A Brave Little Quakeress

E·P·Roe

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A Brave Little Quakeress



E·P·Roe

No 1189.

To Aunt Phebe –

Best wishes for
a very Happy
Christmas,
from Lyde.

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A Brave Little Quakeress

and Other Stories

By

E. P. ROE

Author of

"BARRIERS BURNED AWAY," etc., etc.



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A BRAVE LITTLE QUAKERESS.

A TRADITION OF THE REVOLUTION.

NOT very far from the Highlands of the Hudson, but at a considerable distance from the river, there stood, one hundred years ago, a farm house that evidently had been built as much for strength and defence as for comfort. The dwelling was one story and a half in height, and was constructed of hewn logs, fitted closely together, and made impervious to the weather by old-fashioned mortar, which seems to defy the action of time. Two entrances, facing each other, led to the main or living room, and they were so large that a horse could pass through them, dragging in immense back-logs. These, having been detached from a chain when in the proper position, were rolled into the huge fire-place that yawned like a sooty cavern at the

farther end of the apartment. A modern housekeeper, who finds wood too dear an article for even the air-tight stove, would be appalled by this fireplace. Stalwart Mr. Reynolds, the master of the house, could easily walk under its stony arch without removing his broad-brimmed Quaker hat. From the left side, and at a convenient height from the hearth, a massive crane swung in and out; while high above the centre of the fire was an iron hook, or trammel, from which by chains were suspended the capacious iron pots used in those days for culinary or for stock-feeding purposes. This trammel, which hitherto had suggested only good cheer, was destined to have in coming years a terrible significance to the household.

When the blaze was moderate, or the bed of live coals not too ample, the children could sit on either side of the fireplace and watch the stars through its wide flue; and this was a

favorite amusement of Phebe Reynolds, the eldest daughter of the house.

A door opened from the living-room into the other apartments, furnished in the old massive style that outlasts many generations. All the windows were protected by stout oaken shutters which, when closed, almost transformed the dwelling into a fortress, giving security against any ordinary attack. There were no loopholes in the walls through which the muzzle of the deadly rifle could be thrust and fired from within. This feature, so common in the primitive abodes of the country, was not in accordance with John Reynolds's Quaker principles. While indisposed to fight, it was evident that the good man intended to interpose between himself and his enemies all the passive resistance that his stout little domicile could offer.

And he knew that he had enemies

of the bitterest and most unscrupulous character. He was a stanch Whig, loyal to the American cause, and, above all, resolute and active in the maintenance of law and order in those lawless times. He thus had made himself obnoxious to his Tory neighbors, and an object of hate and fear to a gang of maurauders, who, under the pretence of acting with the British forces, plundered the country far and near. Claudius Smith, the Robin Hood of the Highlands and the terror of the pastoral low country, had formerly been their leader; and the sympathy shown by Mr. Reynolds with all the efforts to bring him to justice, which finally resulted in his capture and execution, had awakened among his former associates an intense desire for revenge. This fact, well known to the farmer, kept him constantly on his guard, and filled his wife and daughter Phebe with deep apprehension.

At the time of our story, Phebe was only twelve years of age, but was mature beyond her years. There were several younger children, and she had become almost womanly in aiding her mother in their care. Her stout, plump little body had been developed rather than enfeebled by early toil, and a pair of resolute and often mirthful blue eyes bespoke a spirit not easily daunted. She was a native growth of the period, vitalized by pure air and out-of-door pursuits, and she abounded in the shrewd intelligence and demure refinement of her sect to a degree that led some of their neighbors to speak of her as "a little old woman." When alone with the children, however, or in the woods and fields, she would doff her Quaker primness, and romp, climb trees, and frolic with the wildest.

But of late, the troublous times and her father's peril had brought unwonted thoughtfulness into her blue

eyes, and more than Quaker gravity to the fresh young face, which, in spite of exposure to sun and wind, maintained much of its inherited fairness of complexion. Of her own accord she was becoming a vigilant sentinel, for a rumor had reached Mr. Reynolds that sooner or later he would have a visit from the dreaded mountain gang of hard riders. Two roads leading to the hills converged on the main highway not far from his dwelling; and from an adjacent knoll Phebe often watched this place, while her father, with a lad in his employ, completed their work about the barn. When the shadows deepened, all was made as secure as possible without and within, and the sturdy farmer, after committing himself and his household to the Divine protection, slept as only brave men sleep who are clear in conscience and accustomed to danger.

His faith was undoubtedly re-

warded; but Providence in the execution of its will loves to use vigilant human eyes and ready, loving hands. The guardian angel destined to protect the good man was his blooming daughter Phebe, who had never thought of herself as an angel, and indeed rarely thought of herself at all, as is usually the case with those who do most to sweeten and brighten the world. She was a natural, wholesome, human child, with all a child's unconsciousness of self. She knew she could not protect her father like a great stalwart son, but she could watch and warn him of danger, and as the sequel proved, she could do far more.

The farmer's habits were well known, and the ruffians of the mountains were aware that after he had shut himself in he was much like Noah in his ark. If they attempted to burn him out, the flames would bring down upon them a score of

neighbors not hampered by Quaker principles. Therefore they resolved upon a sudden onslaught before he had finished the evening labors of the farm. This was what the farmer feared; and Phebe, like a vigilant outpost, was now never absent from her place of observation until called in.

One spring evening she saw two mounted men descending one of the roads which led from the mountains. Instead of jogging quietly out on the highway, as ordinary travellers would have done, they disappeared among the trees. Soon afterward she caught a glimpse of two other horsemen on the second mountain road. One of these soon came into full view, and looked up and down as if to see that all was clear. Apparently satisfied, he gave a low whistle, when three men joined him. Phebe waited to see no more, but sped toward the house, her flaxen curls flying from her flushed and excited face.

"They are coming, father! Thee must be quick!" she cried.

But a moment or two elapsed before all were within the dwelling, the doors banged and barred, the heavy shutters closed, and the home-fortress made secure. Phebe's warning had come none too soon, for they had scarcely time to take breath before the tramp of galloping horses and the oaths of their baffled foes were heard without. The marauders did not dare make much noise, for fear that some passing neighbor might give the alarm. Tying their horses behind the house, where they would be hidden from the road, they tried various expedients to gain an entrance, but the logs and heavy planks baffled them. At last one of the number suggested that they should ascend the roof and climb down the wide flue of the chimney. This plan was easy of execution, and for a few moments the stout farmer thought that

his hour had come. With a heroism far beyond that of the man who strikes down his assailant, he prepared to suffer all things rather than take life with his own hands.

But his wife proved equal to this emergency. She had been making over a bed, and a large basket of feathers was within reach. There were live coals on the hearth, but they did not give out enough heat to prevent the ruffians from descending. Two of them were already in the chimney, and were threatening horrible vengeance if the least resistance was offered. Upon the coals on the hearth the housewife instantly emptied her basket of feathers; and a great volume of pungent, stifling smoke poured up the chimney. The threats of the men, who by means of ropes were cautiously descending, were transformed into choking, half-suffocated sounds, and it was soon evident that the intruders were scram-

bling out as fast as possible. A hurried consultation on the roof ensued, and then, as if something had alarmed them, they galloped off. With the exception of the cries of the peepers, or hylas, in an adjacent swamp, the night soon grew quiet around the closed and darkened dwelling. Farmer Reynolds bowed in thanksgiving over their escape, and then after watching a few hours, slept as did thousands of others in those times of anxiety.

But Phebe did not sleep. She grew old by moments that night as do other girls by months and years; as never before she understood that her father's life was in peril. How much that life meant to her and the little brood of which she was the eldest! How much it meant to her dear mother, who was soon again to give birth to a little one that would need a father's protection and support! As the young girl lay in her little attic room, with dilated

eyes and ears intent on the slightest sound, she was ready for any heroic self-sacrifice, without once dreaming that she was heroic.

The news of the night-attack spread fast, and there was a period of increased vigilance which compelled the outlaws to lie close in their mountain fastnesses. But Phebe knew that her father's enemies were still at large with their hate only stimulated because baffled for a time. Therefore she did not in the least relax her watchfulness; and she besought their nearest neighbors to come to their assistance should any alarm be given.

When the spring and early summer passed without further trouble, they all began to breathe more freely; but one July night John Reynolds was betrayed by his patriotic impulses. He was awakened by a loud knocking at his door. Full of misgiving, he rose and hastily dressed himself; Phebe, who had slipped on her clothes at the

first alarm, joined him and said earnestly,—

"Don't thee open the door, father, to anybody, at this time of night;" and his wife, now lying ill and helpless on a bed in the adjoining room, added her entreaty to that of her daughter. In answer, however, to Mr. Reynolds's inquiries a voice from without, speaking quietly and seemingly with authority, asserted that they were a squad from Washington's forces in search of deserters, and that no harm would ensue unless he denied their lawful request. Conscious of innocence, and aware that detachments were often abroad on such authorized quests, Mr. Reynolds unbarred his door. The moment he opened it he saw his terribe error; not soldiers, but the members of the mountain gang, were crouched like wild beasts ready to spring upon him.

"Fly, father!" cried Phebe. "They won't hurt us;" but before the bewil-

dered man could think what to do, the door flew open from the pressure of half a dozen wild-looking desperadoes, and he was powerless in their grasp. They evidently designed murder, but not a quick and merciful "taking off;" they first heaped upon their victim the vilest epithets, seeking in their thirst for revenge to inflict all the terrors of death in anticipation. The good man, however, now face to face with his fate, grew calm and resigned. Exasperated by his courage, they began to cut and torture him with their swords and knives. Phebe rushed forward to interpose her little form between her father and the ruffians, and was dashed, half stunned, into a corner of the room. Even for the sake of his sick wife, the brave farmer could not refrain from uttering groans of anguish which brought the poor woman with faltering steps into his presence. After one glance at the awful scene she sank, half fainting, on a settee near the door.

When the desire for plunder got the better of their fiendish cruelty, one of the gang threw a noosed rope over Mr. Reynolds's head, and then they hung him to the trammel or iron hook in the great chimney.

"You can't smoke us out this time," they shouted. "You've now got to settle with the avengers of Claudius Smith; and you and some others will find us ugly customers to settle with."

They then rushed off to rob the house, for the farmer was reputed to have not a little money in his strong box. The moment they were gone Phebe seized a knife and cut her father down. Terror and excitement gave her almost supernatural strength, and with the aid of the boy in her father's service she got the poor man on a bed which he had occupied during his wife's illness. Her reviving mother was beginning to direct her movements when the ruffians again entered; and furious with rage, they

again seized and hung her father, while one, more brutal than the others, whipped the poor child with a heavy rope until he thought she was disabled. The girl at first cowered and shivered under the blows, and then sank as if lifeless on the floor. But the moment she was left to herself she darted forward and once more cut her father down. The robbers then flew upon the prostrate man and cut and stabbed him until they supposed he was dead. Toward his family they meditated a more terrible and devilish cruelty. After sacking the house and taking all the plunder they could carry, they relieved the horror-stricken wife and crying, shrieking children of their presence. Their further action, however, soon inspired Phebe with a new and more awful fear, for she found that they had fastened the doors on the outside and were building a fire against one of them.

For a moment an overpowering despair at the prospect of their fate almost paralyzed her. She believed her father was dead. The boy who had aided her at first was now dazed and helpless from terror. If aught could be done in this supreme moment of peril she saw that it must be done by her hands. The smoke from the kindling fire without was already curling in through the crevices around the door. There was not a moment, not a second to be lost. The ruffians' voices were growing fainter, and she heard the sounds of their horses' feet. Would they go away in time for her to extinguish the fire? She ran to her attic room and cautiously opened the shutter. Yes, they were mounting; and in the faint light of the late-rising moon she saw that they were taking her father's horses. A moment later, as if fearing that the blaze might cause immediate pursuit, they dashed off toward the mountains.

The clatter of their horses' hoofs had not died away before the intrepid girl had opened the shutter of a window nearest the ground, and springing lightly out with a pail in her hand she rushed to the trough near the barn, which she knew was full of water. Back and forth she flew between the fire and the convenient reservoir with all the water that her bruised arms and back permitted her to carry. Fortunately the night was a little damp, and the stout thick door had kindled slowly. To her intense joy she soon gained the mastery of the flames, and at last extinguished them.

She did not dare to open the door for fear that the robbers might return, but clambering in at the window, made all secure as had been customary, for now it was her impulse to do just as her father would have done.

She found her mother on her knees beside her father, who would indeed have been a ghastly and awful object to all but the eyes of love.

"Oh, Phebe, I hope—I almost believe thy father lives!" cried the woman. "Is it my throbbing palm, or does his heart still beat?"

"I'm sure it beats, mother!" cried the girl, putting her little hand on the gashed and mangled body.

"Oh, then there's hope! Here, Abner," to the boy, "isn't there any man in thee? Help Phebe get him on the bed, and then we must stop this awful bleeding. O that I were well and strong! Phebe, thee must now take my place. Thee may save thy father's life. I can tell thee what to do if thee has the courage."

Phebe had the courage, and with deft hands did her mother's bidding. She stanched the many gaping wounds; she gave spirits, at first drop by drop, until at last the man breathed and was conscious. Even before the dawn began to brighten over the dreaded Highlands which their ruthless enemies were already climbing,

Phebe was flying, bareheaded, across the fields to their nearest neighbor. The good people heard of the outrage with horror and indignation. A half-grown lad sprang on the bare back of a young horse and galloped across the country for a surgeon. A few moments later the farmer, equipped for chase and battle, dashed away at headlong pace to alarm the neighborhood. The news sped from house to house and hamlet to hamlet like fire in prairie grass. The sun had scarcely risen before a dozen bronzed and stern-browed men were riding into John Reynolds's farm-yard under the lead of young Hal June,—the best shot that the wars had left in the region. The surgeon had already arrived, and before he ceased from his labors he had dressed thirty wounds.

The story told by Phebe had been as brief as it was terrible,—for she was eager to return to her father and sick mother. She had not dreamed

of herself as the heroine of the affair, and had not given any such impression, although more than one had remarked that she was "a plucky little chick to give the alarm before it was light." But when the proud mother faintly and tearfully related the particulars of the tragedy, and told how Phebe had saved her father's life and probably her mother's,—for, "I was too sick to climb out of a window," she said; when she told how the child after a merciless whipping had again cut her father down from the trammel-hook, had extinguished the fire, and had been nursing her father back to life, while all the time in almost agony herself from the cruel blows that had been rained upon her,—Phebe was dazed and bewildered at the storm of applause that greeted her. And when the surgeon, in order to intensify the general desire for vengeance, showed the great welts and scars on her arms and neck, gray-

bearded fathers who had known her from infancy took her into their arms and blessed and kissed her. For once in his life young Hal June wished he was a gray-beard, but his course was much more to the mind of Phebe than any number of caresses would have been. Springing on his great black horse, and with his dark eyes burning with a fire that only blood could quench, he shouted,—

"Come, neighbors, it's time for deeds. That brave little woman ought to make a man of every mother's son of us;" and he dashed away so furiously that Phebe thought with a strange little tremor at her heart that he might in his speed face the robbers all alone. The stout yeomen clattered after him; the sound of their pursuit soon died away; and Phebe returned to woman's work of nursing, watching, and praying.

The bandits of the hills, not expecting such prompt retaliation, were

overtaken, and then followed a headlong race over the rough mountain roads,—guilty wretches flying for life, and stern men almost reckless in the burning desire to avenge a terrible wrong. Although the horses of the marauders were tired, their riders were so well acquainted with the fastnesses of the wilderness that they led the pursuers through exceedingly difficult and dangerous paths. At last, June, ever in the van, caught sight of a man's form, and almost instantly his rifle awoke a hundred echoes among the hills. When they reached the place, stains of blood marked the ground, proving that at least a wound had been given. Just beyond, the gang evidently had dispersed, each one for himself, leaving behind everything that impeded their progress. The region was almost impenetrable in its wildness except by those who knew all its rugged paths. The body of the man whom

June had wounded, however, was found, clothed in a suit of Quaker drab stolen from Mr. Reynolds. The rest of the band with few exceptions met with fates that accorded with their deeds.

Phebe had the happiness of nursing her father back to health, and although maimed and disfigured, he lived to a ripe old age. If the bud is the promise of the flower, Phebe must have developed a womanhood that was regal in its worth; at the same time I believe that she always remained a modest, demure little Quakeress, and never thought of her virtues except when reminded of them in plain English.

NOTE.—In the preceding narrative I have followed almost literally a family tradition of events which actually occurred.

QUEEN OF SPADES.

"MOTHER," remarked Farmer Banning, discontentedly, "Susie is making a long visit."

"She is coming home next week," said his cheery wife. She had drawn her low chair close to the air-tight stove, for a late March snow-storm was raging without.

"It seems to me that I miss her more and more."

"Well, I'm not jealous."

"Oh, come, wife, you needn't be. The idea! But I'd be jealous if our little girl was sorter weaned away from us by this visit in town."

"Now, see here, father, you beat all the men I ever heard of in scolding about farmers borrowing, and here you are borrowing trouble."

"Well, I hope I won't have to pay soon. But I've been thinking the old

farm-house may look small and appear lonely after her gay winter. When she is away, it's too big for me, and a suspicion lonely for us both. I've seen that you've missed her more than I have."

"I guess you're right. Well, she's coming home, as I said, and we must make home seem home to her. The child's growing up. Why, she'll be eighteen week after next. You must give her something nice on her birthday."

"I will," said the farmer, his rugged, weather-beaten face softening with memories. "Is our little girl as old as that? Why, only the other day I was carrying her on my shoulder to the barn and tossing her into the haymow. Sure enough, the 10th of April will be her birthday. Well, she shall choose her own present."

On the afternoon of the 5th of April he went down the long hill to the sta-

tion, and was almost like a lover in his eagerness to see his child. He had come long before the train's schedule time, but was rewarded at last. When Susie appeared, she gave him a kiss before every one, and a glad greeting which might have satisfied the most exacting of lovers. He watched her furtively as they rode at a smart trot up the hill. Farmer Banning kept no old nags for his driving, but strong, well-fed, spirited horses that sometimes drew a light vehicle almost by the reins. "Yes," he thought, "she has grown a little citified. She's paler, and has a certain air or style that don't seem just natural to the hill. Well, thank the Lord! she doesn't seem sorry to go up the hill once more."

"There's the old place, Susie, waiting for you," he said. "It doesn't look so very bleak, does it, after all the fine city houses you've seen?"

"Yes, father, it does. It never appeared so bleak before."

He looked at his home, and in the late gray afternoon, saw it in a measure with her eyes,—the long brown, bare slopes, a few gaunt old trees about the house, and the top-boughs of the apple-orchard behind a sheltering hill in the rear of the dwelling.

"Father," resumed the girl, "we ought to call our place the Bleak House. I never so realized before how bare and desolate it looks, standing there right in the teeth of the north wind."

His countenance fell, but he had no time for comment. A moment later Susie was in her mother's arms. The farmer lifted the trunk to the horse-block and drove to the barn. "I guess it will be the old story," he muttered. "Home has become 'Bleak House.' I suppose it did look bleak to her eyes, especially at this season. Well, well, some day Susie will go to the city to stay, and then it will be Bleak House, sure enough."

"Oh, father," cried his daughter, when after doing his evening work, he entered with the shadow of his thoughts still upon his face,—"oh, father, mother says I can choose my birthday present!"

"Yes, Sue; I've passed my word."

"And so I have your bond. My present will make you open your eyes."

"And pocket-book too, I suppose. I'll trust you, however, not to break me. What is it to be?"

"I'll tell you the day before, and not till then."

After supper they drew around the stove. Mrs. Banning got out her knitting, as usual, and prepared for city gossip. The farmer rubbed his hands over the general aspect of comfort, and especially over the regained presence of his child's bright face. "Well, Sue," he remarked, "you'll own that this room *in* the house doesn't look very bleak?"

"No, father, I'll own nothing of the kind. Your face and mother's are not bleak, but the room is."

"Well," said the farmer, rather disconsolately, "I fear the old place has been spoiled for you. I was saying to mother before you came home—"

"There, now, father, no matter about what you were saying. Let Susie tell us why the room is bleak."

The girl laughed softly, got up, and taking a billet of wood from the box, put it into the air-tight. "The stove has swallowed it just as old Trip did his supper. Shame! you greedy dog," she added, caressing a great Newfoundland that would not leave her a moment. "Why can't you learn to eat your meals like a gentleman?" Then to her father, "Suppose we could sit here and see the flames curling all over and around that stick. Even a camp in the woods is jolly when lighted up by a flickering blaze."

"Oh—h!" said the farmer; "you

think an open fire would take away the bleakness?"

"Certainly. The room would be changed instantly, and mother's face would look young and rosy again. The blue-black of this sheet-iron stove makes the room look blue-black."

"Open fires don't give near as much heat," said her father, meditatively. "They take an awful lot of wood; and wood is getting scarce in these parts."

"I should say so! Why don't you farmers get together, appoint a committee to cut down every tree remaining, then make it a states-prison offence ever to set out another? Why, father, you cut nearly all the trees from your lot a few years ago and sold the wood. Now that the trees are growing again, you are talking of clearing up the land for pasture. Just think of the comfort we could get out of that wood-lot! What crop would pay better? All the upholsterers in

the world cannot furnish a room as an open hard-wood fire does; and all the produce of the farm could not buy anything else half so nice."

"Say, mother," said her father, after a moment, "I guess I'll get down that old Franklin from the garret to-morrow and see if it can't furnish this room."

The next morning he called rather testily to the hired man, who was starting up the lane with an axe, "Hiram, I've got other work for you. Don't cut a stick in that wood-lot unless I tell you."

The evening of the 9th of April was cool but clear, and the farmer said genially, "Well, Sue, prospects good for fine weather on your birthday. Glad of it; for I suppose you will want me to go to town with you for your present, whatever it is to be."

"You'll own up a girl can keep a secret now, won't you?"

"He'll have to own more'n that."

added his wife; "he must own that an old woman hasn't lost any sleep from curiosity."

"How much will be left me to own to-morrow night?" said the farmer, dubiously. "I suppose Sue wants a watch studded with diamonds, or a new house, or something else that she darsn't speak of till the last minute, even to her mother."

"Nothing of the kind. I want only all your time to-morrow, and all Hiram's time, after you have fed the stock."

"All our time!"

"Yes, the entire day, in which you both are to do just what I wish. You are not going gallivanting to the city, but will have to work hard."

"Well, I'm beat! I don't know what you want any more than I did at first."

"Yes, you do,—your time and Hiram's."

"Give it up. It's hardly the season for a picnic. We might go fishing—"

"We must go to bed, so as to be up early, all hands."

"Oh, hold on, Sue; I do like this wood-fire. If it wouldn't make you vain, I'd tell you how—"

"Pretty, father. Say it out."

"Oh, you know it, do you? Well, how pretty you look in the firelight. Even mother, there, looks ten years younger. Keep your low seat, child, and let me look at you. So you're eighteen? My! my! how the years roll around! It *will* be Bleak House for mother and me, in spite of the wood-fire, when you leave us."

"It won't be Bleak House much longer," she replied with a significant little nod.

The next morning at an early hour the farmer said, "All ready, Sue. Our time is yours till night; so queen it over us." And black Hiram grinned acquiescence, thinking he was to have an easy time.

"Queen it, did you say?" cried Sue,

in great spirits. "Well, then, I shall be queen of spades. Get'em, and come with me. Bring a pickaxe, too." She led the way to a point not far from the dwelling, and resumed: "A hole here, father, a hole there, Hiram, big enough for a small hemlock, and holes all along the northeast side of the house. Then lots more holes, all over the lawn, for oaks, maples, dogwood, and all sorts of pretty trees, especially evergreens."

"Oh, ho!" cried the farmer; "now I see the hole where the woodchuck went in."

"But you don't see the hole where he's coming out. When that is dug, even the road will be lined with trees. Foolish old father! you thought I'd be carried away with city gewgaws, fine furniture, dresses, and all that sort of thing. You thought I'd be pining for what you couldn't afford, what wouldn't do you a particle of good, nor me either, in the long run. I'm going to make you set out trees

enough to double the value of your place and take all the bleakness and bareness from this hillside. To-day is only the beginning. I did get some new notions in the city which made me discontented with my home, but they were not the notions you were worrying about. In the suburbs I saw that the most costly houses were made doubly attractive by trees and shrubbery, and I knew that trees would grow for us as well as for millionnaires— My conscience! if there isn't—" and the girl frowned and bit her lips.

"Is that one of the city beaux you were telling us about?" asked her father, *sotto voce.*

"Yes; but I don't want any beaux around to-day. I didn't think *he'd* be so persistent." Then, conscious that she was not dressed for company, but for work upon which she had set her heart, she advanced and gave Mr. Minturn a rather cool greeting.

But the persistent beau was equal to the occasion. He had endured Sue's absence as long as he could, then had resolved on a long day's siege, with a grand storming-onset late in the afternoon.

"Please, Miss Banning," he began, "don't look askance at me for coming at this unearthly hour. I claim the sacred rites of hospitality. I'm an invalid. The doctor said I needed country air, or would have prescribed it if given a chance. You said I might come to see you some day, and by playing Paul Pry I found out, you remember, that this was your birthday, and—"

"And this is my father, Mr. Minturn."

Mr. Minturn shook the farmer's hand with a cordiality calculated to awaken suspicions of his designs in a pump, had its handle been thus grasped. "Mr. Banning will forgive me for appearing with the lark," he

continued volubly, determining to break the ice. "One can't get the full benefit of a day in the country if he starts in the afternoon."

The farmer was polite, but nothing more. If there was one thing beyond all others with which he could dispense, it was a beau for Sue.

Sue gave her father a significant, disappointed glance, which meant, "I won't get my present to-day;" but he turned and said to Hiram, "Dig the hole right there, two feet across, eighteen inches deep." Then he started for the house. While not ready for suitors, his impulse to bestow hospitality was prompt.

The alert Mr. Minturn had observed the girl's glance, and knew that the farmer had gone to prepare his wife for a guest. He determined not to remain unless assured of a welcome. "Come, Miss Banning," he said, "we are at least friends, and should be frank. How much misunderstanding

and trouble would often be saved if people would just speak their thought! This is your birthday,—*your day*. It should not be marred by any one. It would distress me keenly if I were the one to spoil it. Why not believe me literally and have your way absolutely about this day? I could come another time. Now show that a country girl, at least, can speak her mind."

With an embarrassed little laugh she answered, "I'm half inclined to take you at your word; but it would look so inhospitable."

"Bah for looks! The truth, please. By the way, though, you never looked better than in that trim blue walking-suit."

"Old outgrown working-suit, you mean. How sincere you are!"

"Indeed I am. Well, I'm *de trop;* that much is plain. You will let me come another day, won't you?"

"Yes, and I'll be frank too and tell you about *this* day. Father's a busy

man, and his spring work is beginning, but as my birthday-present he has given me all his time and all Hiram's yonder. Well, I learned in the city how trees improved a home; and I had planned to spend this long day in setting out trees,—planned it ever since my return. So you see—"

"Of course I see and approve," cried Minturn. "I know now why I had such a wild impulse to come out here to-day. Why, certainly. Just fancy me a city tramp looking for work, and not praying I won't find it, either. I'll work for my board. I know how to set out trees. I can prove it, for I planted those thrifty fellows growing about our house in town. Think how much more you'll accomplish with another man to help,—one that you can order around to your heart's content."

"The idea of my putting you to work!"

"A capital idea! and if a man

doesn't work when a woman puts him at it he isn't worth the powder—I won't waste time even in original remarks. I'll promise you there will be double the number of trees out by night. Let me take your father's spade and show you how I can dig. Is this the place? If I don't catch up with Hiram, you may send the tramp back to the city." And before she could remonstrate, his coat was off and he at work.

Laughing, yet half in doubt, she watched him. The way he made the earth fly was surprising. "Oh, come," she said after a few moments, "you have shown your good will. A steam-engine could not keep it up at that rate."

"Perhaps not; but I can. Before you engage me, I wish you to know that I am equal to old Adam, and can dig."

"Engage you!" she thought with a little flutter of dismay. "I could

manage him with the help of town conventionalities; but how will it be here? I suppose I can keep father and Hiram within earshot, and if he is so bent on—well, call it a lark, since he has referred to that previous bird, perhaps I might as well have a lark too, seeing it's my birthday." Then she spoke. "Mr. Minturn!"

"I'm busy."

"But really—"

"And truly tell me, am I catching up with Hiram?"

"You'll get down so deep that you'll drop through if you're not careful."

"There's nothing like having a man who is steady working for you. Now, most fellows would stop and giggle at such little amusing remarks."

"You are soiling you trousers."

"Yes, you're right. They *are* mine. There; isn't that a regulation hole? 'Two feet across and eighteen deep.'"

"Yah? yah?" cackled Hiram; "eighteen foot deep! Dat ud be a well."

"Of course it would, and truth would lie at its bottom. Can I stay, Miss Banning?"

"Did you ever see the like?" cried the farmer, who had appeared, unnoticed.

"Look here, father," said the now merry girl, "perhaps I was mistaken. This—"

"Tramp—" interjected Minturn.

"Says he's looking for work and knows how to set out trees."

"And will work all day for a dinner," the tramp promptly added.

"If he can dig holes at that rate, Sue," said her father, catching their spirit, "he's worth a dinner. But you're boss to-day; I'm only one of the hands."

"I'm only another," said Minturn, touching his hat.

"Boss, am I? I'll soon find out. Mr. Minturn, come with me and don a pair of overalls. You sha'n't put me to shame, wearing that spick-and-span

suit, neither shall you spoil it. Oh, you're in for it now! You might have escaped, and come another day, when I could have received you in state and driven you out behind father's frisky bays. When you return to town with blistered hands and aching bones, you will at least know better another time."

"I don't know any better this time, and just yearn for those overalls."

"To the house, then, and see mother before you become a wreck."

Farmer Banning looked after him and shook his head. Hiram spoke his employer's thought, "Dat ar gem'lin act like he gwine ter set hisself out on dis farm."

Sue had often said, "I can never be remarkable for anything; but I won't be commonplace." So she did not leave her guest in the parlor while she rushed off for a whispered conference with her mother. The well-bred simplicity of her manner, which often

stopped just short of brusqueness, was never more apparent than now. "Mother!" she called from the parlor door.

The old lady gave a few final directions to her maid-of-all-work, and then appeared.

"Mother, this is Mr. Minturn, one of my city friends, of whom I have spoken to you. He is bent on helping me set out trees."

"Yes, Mrs. Banning, so bent that your daughter found that she would have to employ her dog to get me off the place."

Now, it had so happened that in discussing with her mother the young men whom she had met, Sue had said little about Mr. Minturn; but that little was significant to the experienced matron. Words had slipped out now and then which suggested that the girl did more thinking than talking concerning him; and she always referred to him in some light which she

chose to regard as ridiculous, but which had not seemed in the least absurd to the attentive listener. When her husband, therefore, said that Mr. Minturn had appeared on the scene, she felt that an era of portentous events had begun. The trees to be set out would change the old place greatly, but a primeval forest shading the door would be as nothing compared with the vicissitude which a favored "beau" might produce. But mothers are more unselfish than fathers, and are their daughters' natural allies unless the suitor is objectionable. Mrs. Banning was inclined to be hospitable on general principles, meantime eager on her own account to see something of this man, about whom she had presentiments. So she said affably, "My daughter can keep her eye on the work which she is so interested in, and yet give you most of her time.—Susan, I will entertain Mr. Minturn while you change your dress."

Sue glanced at her guest dubiously, receiving for the moment the impression that the course indicated by her mother was the correct one. The resolute admirer knew well what a fiasco the day would be should the conventionalities prevail, and so said promptly, "Mrs. Banning, I appreciate your kind intentions, and I hope some day you may have the chance to carry them out. To-day, as your husband understands, I am a tramp from the city looking for work. I have found it, and have been engaged.—Miss Banning, I shall hold you inflexibly to our agreement,—a pair of overalls and dinner."

Sue said a few words of explanation. Her mother laughed, but urged, "Do go and change your dress."

"I protest!" cried Mr. Minturn. "The walking-suit and overalls go together."

"Walking-suit, indeed!" repeated Sue, disdainfully. "But I shall not

change it. I will not soften one feature of the scrape you have persisted in getting yourself into."

"Please don't."

"Mr. Minturn," said the matron, with smiling positiveness, "Susie is boss only out of doors; I am, in the house. There is a fresh-made cup of coffee and some eggs on toast in the dining-room. Having taken such an early start, you ought to have a lunch before being put to work."

"Yes," added Sue, "and the outdoor boss says you can't go to work until at least the coffee is sipped."

"She's shrewd, isn't she, Mrs. Banning? She knows she will get twice as much work out of me on the strength of that coffee. Please get the overalls. I will not sip, but swallow the coffee, unless it's scalding, so that no time may be lost. Miss Banning must see all she had set her heart upon accomplished to-day, and a great deal more."

The matron departed on her quest, and as she pulled out the overalls, nodded her head significantly. "Things will be serious sure enough if he accomplishes all he has set his heart on," she muttered. "Well, he doesn't seem afraid to give us a chance to see him. He certainly will look ridiculous in these overalls, but not much more so than Sue in that old dress. I do wish she would change it."

The girl had considered this point, but with characteristic decision had thought, "No; he shall see us all on the plainest side of our life. He always seemed a good deal of an exquisite in town, and he lives in a handsome house. If to-day's experience at the old farm disgusts him, so be it. My dress is clean and tidy, if it is outgrown and darned; and mother is always neat, no matter what she wears. I'm going through the day just as I planned; and if he's

too fine for us, now is the time to find it out. He may have come just for a lark, and will laugh with his folks to-night over the guy of a girl I appear; but I won't yield even to the putting of a ribbon in my hair."

Mrs. Banning never permitted the serving of cold slops for coffee, and Mr. Minturn had to sip the generous and fragrant beverage slowly. Meanwhile, his thoughts were busy. "Bah! for the old saying, 'Take the goods the gods send,'" he mused. "Go after your goods and take your pick. I knew my head was level in coming out. All is just as genuine as I supposed it would be,—simple, honest, homely. The girl isn't homely, though, but she's just as genuine as all the rest, in that old dress which fits her like a glove. No shams and disguises on this field-day of my life. And her mother! A glance at her comfortable amplitude banished my one fear. There's not a sharp angle

about her. I was satisfied about Miss Sue, but the term 'mother-in-law' suggests vague terrors to any man until reassured.—Ah, Miss Banning," he said, "this coffee would warm the heart of an anchorite. No wonder you are inspired to fine things after drinking such nectar."

"Yes, mother is famous for her coffee. I know that's fine, and you can praise it; but I'll not permit any ironical remarks concerning myself."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, especially when you are mistress of the situation. Still, I can't help having my opinion of you. Why in the world didn't you choose as your present something stylish from the city?"

"Something, I suppose you mean, in harmony with my very stylish surroundings and present appearance."

"I didn't mean anything of the kind, and fancy you know it. Ah! here are the overalls. Now deeds, not words. I'll leave my coat, watch,

cuffs, and all *impedimenta* with you, Mrs. Banning. Am I not a spectacle to men and gods?" he added, drawing up the garment, which ceased to be nether in that it reached almost to his shoulders.

"Indeed you are," cried Sue, holding her side from laughing. Mrs. Banning also vainly tried to repress her hilarity over the absurd guy into which the nattily-dressed city man had transformed himself.

"Come," he cried, "no frivolity! You shall at least say I kept my word about the trees to day." And they started at once for the scene of action, Minturn obtaining on the way a shovel from the tool-room.

"To think she's eighteen years old and got a beau!" muttered the farmer, as he and Hiram started two new holes. They were dug and others begun, yet the young people had not returned. "That's the way with young men nowadays,—'big cry, lit-

tle wool.' I thought I was going to have Sue around with me all day. Might as well get used to it, I suppose. Eighteen! Her mother wasn't much older when—yes, hang it, there's always a *when* with these likely girls. I'd just like to start in again on that day when I tossed her into the hay-mow."

"What are you talking to yourself about, father?"

"Oh! I thought I had seen the last of you to-day."

"Perhaps you will wish you had before night."

"Well, now, Sue! the idea of letting Mr. Minturn rig himself out like that! There's no use of scaring the crows so long before corn-planting." And the farmer's guffaw was quickly joined by Hiram's broad "Yah! yah!"

Sue frowned a little as she said, "He doesn't look any worse than I do."

"Come, Mr. Banning, Solomon in all his glory could not so take your

daughter's eye to-day as a goodly number of trees standing where she wants them. I suggest that you loosen the soil with the pickaxe, then I can throw it out rapidly. Try it."

The farmer did so, not only for Minturn, but for Hiram also. The lightest part of the work thus fell to him. "We'll change about," he said, "when you get tired."

But Minturn did not get weary apparently, and under this new division of the toil the number of holes grew apace.

"Sakes alive, Mr. Minturn!" ejaculated Mr. Banning, "one would think you had been brought up on a farm."

"Or at ditch digging," added the young man. "No; my profession is to get people into hot water and then make them pay roundly to get out. I'm a lawyer. Times have changed in cities. It's there you'll find young men with muscle, if anywhere. Put your hand here, sir, and you'll know

whether Miss Banning made a bad bargain in hiring me for the day."

"Why!" exclaimed the astonished farmer, "you have the muscle of a blacksmith."

"Yes, sir; I could learn that trade in about a month."

"You don't grow muscle like that in a law-office?"

"No, indeed; nothing but bills grow there. A good fashion, if not abused, has come in vogue, and young men develop their bodies as well as brains. I belong to an athletic club in town, and could take to pugilism should everything else fail."

"Is there any prospect of your coming to that?" Sue asked mischievously.

"If we were out walking, and two or three rough fellows gave you impudence—" He nodded significantly.

"What could you do against two or three? They'd close on you."

"A fellow taught to use his hands doesn't let men close on him."

"Yah, yah! reckon not," chuckled Hiram. One of the farm household had evidently been won.

"It seems to me," remarked smiling Sue, "that I saw several young men in town who appeared scarcely equal to carrying their canes."

"Dudes?"

"That's what they are called, I believe."

"They are not men. They are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, but the beginning of the great downward curve of evolution. Men came up from monkeys, it's said, you know, but science is in despair over the final down-comes of dudes. They may evolute into grasshoppers."

The farmer was shaken with mirth, and Sue could not help seeing that he was having a good time. She, however, felt that no tranquilly-exciting day was before her, as she had antici-

pated. What wouldn't that muscular fellow attempt before night? He possessed a sort of vim and cheerful audacity which made her tremble. "He is too confident," she thought, "and needs a lesson. All this digging is like that of soldiers who soon mean to drop their shovels. I don't propose to be carried by storm just when he gets ready. He can have his lark, and that's all to-day. I want a good deal of time to think before I surrender to him or any one else."

During the remainder of the forenoon these musings prevented the slightest trace of sentimentality from appearing in her face or words. She had to admit mentally that Minturn gave her no occasion for defensive tactics. He attended as strictly to business as did Hiram, and she was allowed to come and go at will. At first she merely ventured to the house, to "help mother," as she said. Then, with growing confidence, she went

here and there to select sites for trees; but Minturn dug on no longer "like a steam-engine," yet in an easy, steady, effective way that was a continual surprise to the farmer.

"Well, Sue," said her father at last, "you and mother ought to have an extra dinner; for Mr. Minturn certainly has earned one."

"I promised him only a dinner," she replied; "nothing was said about its being extra."

"Quantity is all I'm thinking of," said Minturn. "I have the sauce which will make it a feast."

"Reckon it's gwine on twelve," said Hiram, cocking his eye at the sun. "Hadn't I better feed de critters?"

"Ah, old man! own up, now; you've got a backache," said Minturn.

"Dere is kin' ob a crik comin'—"

"Drop work, all hands," cried Sue. "Mr. Minturn has a 'crik' also, but he's too proud to own it. How you'll groan for this to-morrow, sir!"

"If you take that view of the case, I may be under the necessity of giving proof positive to the contrary by coming out to-morrow."

"You're not half through yet. The hardest part is to come."

"Oh, I know that," he replied; and he gave her such a humorously-appealing glance that she turned quickly toward the house to hide a conscious flush.

The farmer showed him to the spare-room, in which he found his belongings. Left to make his toilet, he muttered, "Ah, better and better! This is not the regulation refrigerator into which guests are put at farm-houses. All needed for solid comfort is here, even to a slight fire in the air-tight. Now, isn't that rosy old lady a jewel of a mother-in-law? She knows that a warm man shouldn't get chilled just as well as if she had studied athletics. Miss Sue, however, is a little chilly. She's on the fence

yet. Jupiter! I *am* tired. Oh, well, I don't believe I'll have seven years of this kind of thing. You were right, though, old man, if your Rachel was like mine. What's that rustle in the other room? She's dressing for dinner. So must I; and I'm ready for it. If she has romantic ideas about love and lost appetites, I'm a goner."

When he descended to the parlor, his old stylish self again, Sue was there, robed in a gown which he had admired before, revealing the fact to her by approving glances. But now he said, "You don't look half so well as you did before."

"I can't say that of you," she replied.

"A man's looks are of no consequence."

"Few men think so."

"Oh, they try to please such critical eyes as I now am meeting."

"And throw dust in them too sometimes."

"Yes; gold dust, often. I haven't much of that."

"It would be a pity to throw it away if you had."

"No matter how much was thrown, I don't think it would blind you, Miss Banning."

The dining-room door across the hall opened, and the host and hostess appeared. "Why, father and mother, how fine you look!"

"It would be strange indeed if we did not honor this day," said Mrs. Banning. "I hope you have not so tired yourself, sir, that you cannot enjoy your dinner. I could scarcely believe my eyes as I watched you from the window."

"I am afraid I shall astonish you still more at the table. I am simply ravenous."

"This is your chance," cried Sue. "You are now to be paid in the coin you asked for."

Sue did remark to herself by the

time they reached dessert and coffee, "I need have no scruples in refusing a man with such an appetite; he won't pine. He is a lawyer, sure enough. He is just winning father and mother hand over hand."

Indeed, the bosom of good Mrs. Banning must have been environed with steel not to have had throbs of good-will toward one who showed such hearty appreciation of her capital dinner. But Sue became only the more resolved that she was not going to yield so readily to this muscular suitor who was digging and eating his way straight into the hearts of her ancestors, and she proposed to be unusually elusive and alert during the afternoon. She was a little surprised when he resumed his old tactics.

After drinking a second cup of coffee, he rose, and said, "As an honest man, I have still a great deal to do after such a dinner."

"Well, it has just done me good to

see you," said Mrs. Banning, smiling genially over her old-fashioned coffee-pot. "I feel highly complimented."

"I doubt whether I shall be equal to another such compliment before the next birthday. I hope, Miss Susie, you have observed my efforts to do honor to the occasion?"

"Oh," cried the girl, "I naturally supposed you were trying to get even in your bargain."

"I hope to be about sundown. I'll get into those overalls at once, and I trust you will put on your walking-suit."

"Yes, it will be a walking-suit for a short time. We must walk to the wood-lot for the trees, unless you prefer to ride.—Father, please tell Hiram to get the two-horse wagon ready."

When the old people were left alone, the farmer said, "Well, mother, Sue *has* got a suitor, and if he don't suit her—" And then his wit gave out.

"There, father, I never thought

you'd come to that. It's well she has, for you will soon have to be taken care of."

"He's got the muscle to do it. He shall have my law-business, anyway."

"Thank the Lord, it isn't much; but that's not saying he shall have Sue."

"Why, what have you against him?"

"Nothing so far. I was only finding out if you had anything against him."

"Lawyers, indeed! What would become of the men if women turned lawyers. Do you think Sue—"

"Hush!"

They all laughed till the tears came when Minturn again appeared dressed for work; but he nonchalantly lighted a cigar and was entirely at his ease.

Sue was armed with thick gloves and a pair of pruning-nippers. Minturn threw a spade and pickaxe on his shoulder, and Mr. Banning, whom

Sue had warned threateningly "never to be far away," tramped at their side as they went up the lane. Apparently there was no need of such precaution, for the young man seemed wholly bent on getting up the trees, most of which she had selected and marked during recent rambles. She helped now vigorously, pulling on the young saplings as they loosened the roots, then trimming them into shape. More than once, however, she detected glances, and his thoughts were more flattering than she imagined. "What vigor she has in that supple, rounded form! Her very touch ought to put life into these trees; I know it would into me. How young she looks in that comical old dress which barely reaches her ankles! Yes, Hal Minturn; and remember, that trim little ankle can put a firm foot down for or against you,—so no blundering."

He began to be doubtful whether he would make his grand attack that

day, and finally decided against it, unless a very favorable opportunity occurred, until her plan of birthday-work had been carried out and he had fulfilled the obligation into which he had entered in the morning. He labored on manfully, seconding all her wishes, and taking much pains to get the young trees up with an abundance of fibrous roots. At last his assiduity induced her to relent a little, and she smiled sympathetically as she remarked, "I hope you are enjoying yourself. Well, never mind; some other day you will fare better."

"Why should I not enjoy myself?" he asked in well-feigned surprise. "What condition of a good time is absent? Even an April day has forgotten to be moody, and we are having unclouded, genial sunshine. The air is delicious with springtime fragrance. Were ever hemlocks so aromatic as these young fellows? They come out of the ground so readily

that one would think them aware of their proud destiny. Of course I'm enjoying myself. Even the robins and sparrows know it, and are singing as if possessed."

"Hadn't you better give up your law-office and turn farmer?"

"This isn't farming. This is embroidery-work."

"Well, if all these trees grow they will embroider the old place, won't they?"

"They'll grow, every mother's son of 'em."

"What makes you so confident?"

"I'm not confident. That's where you are mistaken." And he gave her such a direct, keen look that she suddenly found something to do elsewhere.

"I declare!" she exclaimed mentally, "he seems to read my very thoughts."

At last the wagon was loaded with trees enough to occupy the holes

which had been dug, and they started for the vicinity of the farm-house again. Mr. Banning had no match-making proclivities where Sue was concerned, as may be well understood, and had never been far off. Minturn, however, had appeared so single-minded in his work, so innocent of all designs upon his daughter, that the old man began to think that this day's performance was only a tentative and preliminary skirmish, and that if there were danger it lurked in the unknown future. He was therefore inclined to be less vigilant, reasoning philosophically, "I suppose it's got to come some time or other. It looks as if Sue might go a good deal farther than this young man and fare worse. But then she's only eighteen, and he knows it. I guess he's got sense enough not to plant his corn till the sun's higher. He can see with half an eye that my little girl isn't ready to drop, like an over-ripe ap-

ple." Thus mixing metaphors and many thoughts, he hurried ahead to open the gate for Hiram.

"I'm in for it now," thought Sue, and she instinctively assumed an indifferent expression and talked volubly of trees.

"Yes, Miss Banning," he said formally, "by the time your hair is tinged with gray the results of this day's labor will be seen far and wide. No passenger in the cars, no traveller in the valley, but will turn his eyes admiringly in this direction."

"I wasn't thinking of travellers," she answered, "but of making an attractive home in which I can grow old contentedly. Some day when you have become a gray-haired and very dignified judge you may come out and dine with us again. You can then smoke your cigar under a tree which you helped to plant."

"Certainly, Miss Banning. With such a prospect, how could you doubt

that I was enjoying myself? What suggested the judge? My present appearance?"

The incongruity of the idea with his absurd aspect and a certain degree of nervousness set her off again, and she startled the robins by a laugh as loud and clear as their wild notes.

"I don't care," she cried. "I've had a jolly birthday, and am accomplishing all on which I had set my heart."

"Yes, and a great deal more, Miss Banning," he replied with a formal bow. "In all your scheming you hadn't set your heart on my coming out and—does modesty permit me to say it?—helping a little."

"Now, you *have* helped wonderfully, and you must not think I don't appreciate it."

"Ah, how richly I am rewarded!"

She looked at him with a laughing and perplexed little frown, but only said, "No irony, sir."

By this time they had joined her father and begun to set out the row of hemlocks. To her surprise, Sue had found herself a little disappointed that he had not availed himself of his one opportunity to be at least "a bit friendly," as she phrased it. It was mortifying to a girl to be expecting "something awkward to meet" and nothing of the kind take place. "After all," she thought, "perhaps he came out just for a lark, or worse still, is amusing himself at my expense; or he may have come on an exploring expedition and plain old father and mother, and the plain little farm-house, have satisfied him. Well, the dinner wasn't very plain, but he may have been laughing in his sleeve at our lack of style in serving it. Then this old dress! I probably appear to him a perfect guy." And she began to hate it, and devoted it to the rag bag the moment she could get it off.

This line of thought, once begun, seemed so rational that she wondered it had not occurred to her before. "The idea of my being so ridiculously on the defensive!" she thought. "No, it wasn't ridiculous either, as far as my action went, for he can never say I *acted* as if I wanted him to speak. My conceit in expecting him to speak the moment he got a chance *was* absurd. He has begun to be very polite and formal. That's always the way with men when they want to back out of anything. He came out to look us over, and me in particular; he made himself into a scarecrow just because I looked like one, and now will go home and laugh it all over with his city friends. Oh, why did he come and spoil my day? Even he said it *was* my day, and he has done a mean thing in spoiling it. Well, he may not carry as much self-complacency back to town as he thinks he will. Such a cold-blooded

spirit, too!—to come upon us unawares in order to spy out everything, for fear he might get taken in! You are very attentive and flattering in the city, sir, but now you are disenchanted. Well, so am I."

Under the influence of this train of thought she grew more and more silent. The sun was sinking westward in undimmed splendor, but her face was clouded. The air was sweet, balmy, well adapted to sentiment and the setting out of trees, but she was growing frosty.

"Hiram," she said shortly, "you've got that oak crooked; let me hold it." And thereafter she held the trees for the old colored man as he filled in the earth around them.

Minturn appeared as oblivious as he was keenly observant. At first the change in Sue puzzled and discouraged him; then, as his acute mind sought her motives, a rosy light began to dawn upon him. "I may

be wrong," he thought, "but I'll take my chances in acting as if I were right before I go home."

At last Hiram said, "Reckon I'll have to feed de critters again;" and he slouched off.

Sue snipped at the young trees farther and farther away from the young man who must "play spy before being lover." The spy helped Mr. Banning set out the last tree. Meantime, the complacent farmer had mused, "The little girl's safe for another while, anyhow. Never saw her more offish; but things looked squally about dinner-time. Then, she's only eighteen; time enough years hence." At last he said affably, "I'll go in and hasten supper, for you've earned it if ever a man did, Mr. Minturn. Then I'll drive you down to the evening train." And he hurried away.

Sue's back was towards them, and she did not hear Minturn's step until

he was close beside her. "All through," he said; "every tree out. I congratulate you; for rarely in this vale of tears are plans and hopes crowned with better success."

"Oh, yes," she hastened to reply; "I am more than satisfied. I hope that you are, too."

"I have no reason to complain," he said. "You have stood by your morning's bargain, as I have tried to."

"It was your own fault, Mr. Minturn, that it was so one-sided. But I've no doubt you enjoy spicing your city life with a little lark in the country."

"It *was* a one-sided bargain, and I have had the best of it."

"Perhaps you have," she admitted. "I think supper will be ready by the time we are ready for it." And she turned toward the house. Then she added, "You must be weary and anxious to get away."

"You were right; my bones *do*

ache. And look at my hands. I know you'll say they need washing; but count the blisters."

"I also said, Mr. Minturn, that you would know better next time. So you see I was right then and am right now."

"Are you perfectly sure?"

"I see no reason to think otherwise." In turning, she had faced a young sugar-maple which he had aided her in planting early in the afternoon. Now she snipped at it nervously with her pruning-shears, for he would not budge, and she felt it scarcely polite to leave him.

"Well," he resumed, after an instant, "it has a good look, hasn't it, for a man to fulfil an obligation literally?"

"Certainly, Mr. Minturn," and there was a tremor in her tone; "but you have done a hundredfold more than I expected, and never were under any obligations."

"Then I am free to begin again?"

"You are as free now as you have been all day to do what you please." And her shears were closing on the main stem of the maple. He caught and stayed her hand. "I don't care!" she cried almost passionately. "Come, let us go in and end this foolish talk."

"But I do care," he replied, taking the shears from her, yet retaining her hand in his strong grasp. "I helped you plant this tree, and whenever you see it, whenever you care for it, when, in time, you sit under its shade or wonder at its autumn hues, I wish you to remember that I told you of my love beside it. Dear little girl, do you think I am such a blind fool that I could spend this long day with you at your home and not feel sorry that I must ever go away? If I could, my very touch should turn the sap of this maple into vinegar. To-day I've only tried to show how I can work

for you. I am eager to begin again, and for life."

At first Sue had tried to withdraw her hand, but its tenseness relaxed. As he spoke, she turned her averted face slowly toward him, and the rays of the setting sun flashed a deeper crimson into her cheeks. Her honest eyes looked into his and were satisfied. Then she suddenly gathered the young tree against her heart and kissed the stem she had so nearly severed. "This maple is witness to what you've said," she faltered. "Ah! but it will be a sugar-maple in truth; and if petting will make it live —there, now! behave! The idea! right out on this bare lawn! You must wait till the screening evergreens grow before— Oh, you audacious—I haven't promised anything."

"I promise everything. I'm engaged, and only taking my retaining fees."

"Mother," cried Farmer Banning at the dining-room window, "just look yonder!"

"And do you mean to say, John Banning, that you didn't expect it?"

"Why, Sue was growing more and more offish."

"Of course! Don't you remember?"

"Oh, this unlucky birthday! As if trees could take Sue's place!"

"Yah!" chuckled Hiram from the barn door, "I knowed dat ar gem'lin was a-diggin' a hole fer hisself on dis farm."

"Mr. Minturn—" Sue began as they came toward the house arm in arm.

"Hal—" he interrupted.

"Well, then, Mr. Hal, you must promise me one thing in dead earnest. I'm the only chick father and mother have. You must be very considerate of them, and let me give them as much of my time as I can.

This is all that I stipulate; but this I do."

"Sue," he said in mock solemnity, "the prospects are that you'll be a widow."

"Why do you make such an absurd remark?"

"Because you have struck amidships the commandment with the promise, and your days will be long in the land. You'll outlive everybody."

"This will be no joke for father and mother."

So it would appear. They sat in the parlor as if waiting for the world to come to an end,—as indeed it had, one phase of it, to them. Their little girl, in a sense, was theirs no longer.

"Father, mother," said Sue, demurely, "I must break some news to you."

"It's broken already," began Mrs. Banning, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

Sue's glance renewed her reproaches for the scene on the lawn; but Minturn went promptly forward, and throwing his arm around the matron's plump shoulders, gave his first filial kiss.

"Come, mother," he said, "Sue has thought of you both; and I've given her a big promise that I won't take any more of her away than I can help. And you, sir," wringing the farmer's hand, "will often see a city tramp here who will be glad to work for his dinner. These overalls are my witness."

Then they became conscious of his absurd figure, and the scene ended in laughter that was near akin to tears.

The maple lived, you may rest assured; and Sue's children said there never was such sugar as the sap of that tree yielded.

All the hemlocks, oaks, and dogwood thrived as if conscious that theirs had been no ordinary trans-

planting; while Minturn's half-jesting prophecy concerning the travellers in the valley was amply ful filled.

CAUGHT ON THE EBB-TIDE.

THE August morning was bright and fair, but Herbert Scofield's brow was clouded. He had wandered off to a remote part of the grounds of a summer hotel on the Hudson, and seated in the shade of a tree, had lapsed into such deep thought that his cigar had gone out and the birds were becoming bold in the vicinity of his motionless figure.

It was his vacation-time and he had come to the country ostensibly for rest. As the result, he found himself in the worst state of unrest that he had ever known. Minnie Madison, a young lady he had long admired, was the magnet that had drawn him hither. Her arrival had preceded his by several weeks; and she had smiled a little consciously when in looking at the hotel register

late one afternoon his bold chirography met her eye.

"There are so many other places to which he might have gone," she murmured

Her smile, however, was a doubtful one, not expressive of gladness and entire satisfaction. In mirthful saucy fashion her thoughts ran on, "The time has come when he might have a respite from business. Does he still mean business by coming here? I'm not sure that I do, although the popular idea seems to be that a girl should have no vacation in the daily effort to find a husband. I continually disappoint the good people by insisting that the husband must find me. I have a presentiment that Mr. Scofield is looking for me; but there are some kinds of property which cannot be picked up and carried off, *nolens volens,* when found."

Scofield had been animated by no such clearly-defined purpose as he

was credited with when he sought the summer resort graced by Miss Madison. His action seemed to him tentative, his motive ill-defined even in his own consciousness, yet it had been strong enough to prevent any hesitancy. He knew he was weary from a long year's work. He purposed to rest and take life very leisurely, and he had mentally congratulated himself that he was doing a wise thing in securing proximity to Miss Madison. She had evoked his admiration in New York, excited more than a passing interest, but he felt that he did not know her very well. In the unconventional life now in prospect he could see her daily and permit his interest to be dissipated or deepened, as the case might be, while he remained, in the strictest sense of the word, uncommitted. It was a very prudent scheme and not a bad one. He reasoned justly, "This selecting a wife is no bagatelle. A man

wishes to know something more about a woman than he can learn in a drawing-room or at a theatre party."

But now he was in trouble. He had been unable to maintain this judicial aspect. He had been made to understand at the outset that Miss Madison did not regard herself as a proper subject for deliberate investigation, and that she was not inclined to aid in his researches. So far from meeting him with engaging frankness and revealing her innermost soul for his inspection, he found her as elusive as only a woman of tact can be when so minded, even at a place where people meet daily. It was plain to him from the first that he was not the only man who favored her with admiring glances; and he soon discovered that young Merriweather and his friend Hackley had passed beyond the neutral ground of non-committal. He set himself the task of learning how far these suitors had progressed

in her good graces; he would not be guilty of the folly of giving chase to a prize already virtually captured. This too had proved a failure. Clearly, would he know what Mr. Merriweather and Mr. Hackley were to Miss Madison he must acquire the power of mind reading. Each certainly appeared to be a very good friend of hers,—a much better friend than he could claim to be, for in his case she maintained a certain unapproachableness which perplexed and nettled him.

After a week of rest, observation, and rather futile effort to secure a reasonable share of Miss Madison's society and attention, he became assured that he was making no progress whatever so far as she was concerned, but very decided progress in a condition of mind and heart anything but agreeable should the affair continue so one-sided. He had hoped to see her daily, and was not disappointed.

He had intended to permit his mind to receive such impressions as he should choose; and now his mind asked no permission whatever, but without volition occupied itself with her image perpetually. He was not sure whether she satisfied his preconceived ideals of what a wife should be or not, for she maintained such a firm reticence in regard to herself that he could put his finger on no affinities. She left no doubt as to her intelligence, but beyond that she would not reveal herself to him. He was almost satisfied that she discouraged him utterly and that it would be wiser to depart before his feelings became more deeply involved. At any rate he had better do this or else make love in dead earnest. Which course should he adopt?

There came a day which brought him to a decision.

A party had been made up for an excursion into the Highlands, Miss

Madison being one of the number. She was a good pedestrian and rarely missed a chance for a ramble among the hills. Scofield's two rivals occasionally got astray with her in the perplexing wood-roads, but he never succeeded in securing such good fortune. On this occasion, as they approached a woodchopper's cottage (or rather, hovel), there were sounds of acute distress within,—the piercing cries of a child evidently in great pain. There was a moment of hesitancy in the party, and then Miss Madison's graceful indifference vanished utterly. As she ran hastily to the cabin, Scofield felt that now probably was a chance for more than mere observation, and he kept beside her. An ugly cur sought to bar entrance; but his vigorous kick sent it howling away. She gave him a quick pleased look as they entered. A slatternly woman was trying to soothe a little boy, who at all her attempts only

writhed and shrieked the more. "I dunno what ails the young one," she said. "I found him a moment ago yellin' at the foot of a tree. Suthin's the matter with his leg."

"Yes," cried Miss Madison, delicately feeling of the member,—an operation which, even under her gentle touch, caused increased outcry, "it is evidently broken. Let me take him on my lap;" and Scofield saw that her face had softened into the tenderest pity.

"I will bring a surgeon at the earliest possible moment," exclaimed Scofield, turning to go.

Again she gave him an approving glance which warmed his heart. "The ice is broken between us now," he thought, as he broke through the group gathering at the open door.

Never before had he made such time down a mountain, for he had a certain kind of consciousness that he was not only going after the doctor,

but also after the girl. Securing a stout horse and wagon at the hotel, he drove furiously for the surgeon, explained the urgency, and then, with the rural healer at his side, almost killed the horse in returning.

He found his two rivals at the cabin door, the rest of the party having gone on. Miss Madison came out quickly. An evanescent smile flitted across her face as she saw his kindled eyes and the reeking horse, which stood trembling and with bowed head. His ardor was a little dampened when she went directly to the poor beast and said, "This horse is a rather severe indictment against you, Mr. Scofield. There was need of haste, but—" and she paused significantly.

"Yes," added the doctor, springing out, "I never saw such driving? It's lucky our necks are not broken."

"You are all right, Doctor, and ready for your work," Scofield re-

marked brusquely. "As for the horse, I'll soon bring him around;" and he rapidly began to unhitch the over-driven animal.

"What are you going to do?" Miss Madison asked curiously.

"Rub him into as good shape as when he started."

She turned away to hide a smile as she thought, "He has waked up at last."

The boy was rendered unconscious, and his leg speedily put in the way of restoration. "He will do very well now if my directions are carried out strictly," the physician was saying when Scofield entered.

Mr. Merriweather and Mr. Hackley stood rather helplessly in the background and were evidently giving more thought to the fair nurse than to the patient. The mother was alternating between lamentations and invocations of good on the "young leddy's" head. Finding that he would

come in for a share of the latter, Scofield retreated again. Miss Madison walked quietly out, and looking critically at the horse, remarked, "You have kept your word very well, Mr. Scofield. The poor creature does look much improved." She evidently intended to continue her walk with the two men in waiting, for she said demurely with an air of dismissal, "You will have the happy consciousness of having done a good deed this morning."

"Yes," replied Scofield, in significant undertone; "you, of all others, Miss Madison, know how inordinately happy I shall be in riding back to the village with the doctor."

She raised her eyebrows in a little well-feigned surprise at his words, then turned away.

During the remainder of the day he was unable to see her alone for a moment, or to obtain any further reason to believe that the ice was in

reality broken between them. But his course was no longer noncommittal, even to the most careless observer. The other guests of the house smiled; and Mr. Merriweather and Mr. Hackley looked askance at one who threw their assiduous attentions quite into the shade. Miss Madison maintained her composure, was oblivious as far as possible, and sometimes when she could not appear blind, looked a little surprised and even offended.

He had determined to cast prudence and circumlocution to the winds. On the morning following the episode in the mountains he was waiting to meet her when she came down to breakfast. "I've seen that boy, Miss Madison, and he's doing well."

"What! so early? You are a very kind-hearted man, Mr. Scofield."

"About as they average. That you are not kind-hearted I know,—at least to every one except me,—for I saw

your expression as you examined the little fellow's injury yesterday. You thought only of the child—"

"I hope you did also, Mr. Scofield," she replied with an exasperating look of surprise.

"You know well I did not," he answered bluntly. "I thought it would be well worth while to have my leg broken if you would look at me in the same way."

"Truly, Mr. Scofield, I fear you are not as kind-hearted as I supposed you to be;" and then she turned to greet Mr. Merriweather.

"Won't you let me drive you up to see the boy?" interposed Scofield, boldly.

"I'm sorry, but I promised to go up with the doctor this morning."

And so affairs went on. He thought at times her color quickened a little when he approached suddenly; he fancied that he occasionally surprised a half-wistful, half-mirthful glance,

but was not sure. He knew that she was as well aware of his intentions and wishes as if he had proclaimed them through a speaking-trumpet. His only assured ground of comfort was that neither Mr. Merriweather nor Mr. Hackley had yet won the coveted prize, though they evidently were receiving far greater opportunities to push their suit than he had been favored with.

At last his vacation was virtually at an end. But two more days would elapse before he must be at his desk again in the city. And now we will go back to the time when we found him that early morning brooding over his prospects, remote from observation. What should he do,—propose by letter? "No," he said after much cogitation. "I can see that little affected look of surprise with which she would read my plain declaration of what she knows so well. Shall I force a private inter-

view with her? The very word 'force,' which I have unconsciously used, teaches me the folly of this course. She doesn't care a rap for me, and I should have recognized the truth long ago. I'll go back to the hotel and act toward her precisely as she has acted toward me. I can then at least take back to town a little shred of dignity."

He appeared not to see her when she came down to breakfast. After the meal was over he sat on the piazza engrossed in the morning paper. An excursion party for the mountains was forming. He merely bowed politely as she passed him to join it, but he ground his teeth as he saw Merriweather and Hackley escorting her away. When they were out of sight he tossed the paper aside and went down to the river, purposing to row the fever out of his blood. He was already satisfied how difficult his tactics would be should he continue

to see her, and he determined to be absent all day, to so tire himself out that exhaustion would bring early sleep on his return.

Weary and leaden-spirited enough he was, as late in the afternoon he made his way back, but firm in sudden resolve to depart on an early train in the morning and never voluntarily to see the obdurate lady of his affections again.

Just as the sun was about sinking he approached a small wooded island about half a mile from the boat-house, and was surprised to notice a rowboat high and dry upon the beach. "Some one has forgotten that the tide is going out," he thought, as he passed; but it was no affair of his.

A voice called faintly, "Mr. Scofield!"

He started at the familiar tones, and looked again. Surely that was Miss Madison standing by the prow of the stranded skiff! He knew well

indeed it was she; and he put his boat about with an energy not in keeping with his former languid strokes. Then, recollecting himself, he became pale with the self-control he purposed to maintain. "She is in a scrape," he thought; "and calls upon me as she would upon any one else to get her out of it."

Weariness and discouragement inclined him to be somewhat reckless and brusque in his words and manner. Under the compulsion of circumstances she who would never graciously accord him opportunities must now be alone with him; but as a gentleman, he could not take advantage of her helplessness, to plead his cause, and he felt a sort of rage that he should be mocked with an apparent chance which was in fact no chance at all.

His boat stranded several yards from the shore. Throwing down his oars, he rose and faced her. Was it

the last rays of the setting sun which made her face so rosy, or was it embarrassment?

"I'm in a dilemma, Mr. Scofield," Miss Madison began hesitatingly.

"And you would rather be in your boat," he added.

"That would not help me any, seeing where my boat is. I have done such a stupid thing! I stole away here to finish a book, and—well—I didn't notice that the tide was running out. I'm sure I don't know what I'm going to do."

Scofield put his shoulder to an oar and tried to push his craft to what deserved the name of shore, but could make little headway. He was glad to learn by the effort, however, that the black mud was not unfathomable in depth. Hastily reversing his action, he began pushing his boat back into the water.

"Surely, Mr. Scofield, you do not intend to leave me," began Miss Madison.

"Surely not," he replied; "but then, since you are so averse to my company, I must make sure that my boat does not become as fast as yours on this ebb-tide, otherwise we should both have to wait till the flood."

"Oh, beg pardon! I now understand. But how can you reach me?"

"Wade," he replied coolly, proceeding to take off his shoes and stockings.

"What! through that horrid black mud?"

"I couldn't leap that distance, Miss Madison."

"It's too bad! I'm so provoked with myself! The mud may be very deep, or there may be a quicksand or something."

"In which case I should merely disappear a little earlier;" and he sprang overboard up to his knees, dragged the boat till it was sufficiently fast in the ooze to be stationary, then he waded ashore.

"Well," she said with a little deprecatory laugh, "it's a comfort not to be alone on a desert island."

"Indeed! Can I be welcome under any circumstances?"

"Truly, Mr. Scofield, you know that you were never more welcome. It's very kind of you."

"Any man would be glad to come to your aid. It is merely your misfortune that I happen to be the one."

"I'm not sure that I regard it as a very great misfortune. You proved in the case of that little boy that you can act very energetically."

"And get lectured for my intemperate zeal. Well, Miss Madison, I cannot make a very pleasing spectacle with blackamoor legs, and it's time I put my superfluous energy to some use. Suppose you get in your boat, and I'll try to push it off."

She complied with a troubled look in her face. He pushed till the veins knotted on his forehead. At this she

sprang out, exclaiming, "You'll burst a blood-vessel."

"That's only a phase of a ruptured heart, and you are used to such phenomena."

"It's too bad for you to talk in that way," she cried.

"It certainly is. I will now attend strictly to business."

"I don't see what you can do."

"Carry you out to my boat,—that is all I can do."

"Oh, Mr. Scofield!"

"Can you suggest anything else!"

She looked dubiously at the intervening black mud, and was silent.

"I could go up to the hotel and bring Mr. Merriweather and Mr. Hackley."

She turned away to hide her tears.

"Or I could go after a brawny boatman; but delay is serious, for the tide is running out fast and the stretch of mud growing wider. Can you not imagine me Mike or Tim, or some fellow of that sort."

"No, I can't."

"Then perhaps you wish me to go for Mike or Tim?"

"But the tide is running out so fast, you said,"

"Yes, and it will soon be dark."

"Oh, dear!" and there was distress in her tones.

He now said kindly, "Miss Madison, I wish that like Sir Walter Raleigh I had a mantle large enough for you to walk over. You can at least imagine that I am a gentleman, that you may soon be at the hotel, and no one ever be any the wiser that you had to choose between me and the deep—ah, well—mud."

"There is no reason for such an allusion, Mr. Scofield."

"Well, then, that you had no other choice."

"That's better. But how in the world can you manage it?"

"You will have to put your arm around my neck."

"Oh!"

"You would put your arm around a post, wouldn't you?" he asked with more than his old brusqueness.

"Yes-s; but—"

"But the tide is going out. My own boat will soon be fast. Dinner will grow cold at the hotel, and you are only the longer in dispensing with me. You must consider the other dire alternatives."

"Oh, I forgot that you were in danger of losing a warm dinner."

"You know I have lost too much to think of that or much else. But there is no need of satire, Miss Madison. I will do whatever you wish. That truly is *carte blanche* enough even for this occasion."

"I didn't mean to be satirical. I—I— Well, have your own way."

"Not if you prefer some other way."

"You have shown that practically there isn't any other way. I'm sorry

that my misfortune, or fault rather, should also be your misfortune. You don't know how heavy—"

"I soon will, and you must endure it all with such grace as you can. Put your arm around my neck, so—oh, that will never do! Well, you'll hold tight enough when I'm floundering in the mud."

Without further ado he picked her up, and started rapidly for his boat. Stepping on a smooth stone he nearly fell, and her arm did tighten decidedly.

"If you try to go so fast," she said, "you will fall."

"I was only seeking to shorten your ordeal, but for obvious reasons must go slowly;" and he began feeling his way.

"Mr. Scofield, am I not very heavy?" she asked softly.

"Not as heavy as my heart, and you know it."

"I'm sure I—"

"No, you are not to blame. Moths have scorched their wings before now, and will always continue to do so."

Her head rested slightly against his shoulder; her breath fanned his cheek; her eyes, soft and lustrous, sought his. But he looked away gloomy and defiant, and she felt his grasp tighten vice-like around her. "I shall not affect any concealment of the feelings which she has recognized so often, nor shall I ask any favors," he thought. "There," he said, as he placed her in his boat, "you are safe enough now. Now go aft while I push off."

When she was seated he exerted himself almost as greatly as before, and the boat gradually slid into the water. He sprang in and took the oars.

"Aren't you going to put on your shoes and stockings?"

"Certainly, when I put you ashore."

"Won't that be a pretty certain way of revealing the plight in which you found me?"

"Pardon my stupidity; I was preoccupied with the thought of relieving you from the society which you have hitherto avoided so successfully;" and bending over his shoes he tied them almost savagely.

There was a wonderful degree of mirth and tenderness in her eyes as she watched him. They had floated by a little point; and as he raised his head he saw a form which he recognized as Mr. Merriweather rowing toward them. "There comes one of your shadows," he said mockingly. "Be careful how you exchange boats when he comes alongside. I will give you no help in such a case."

She looked hastily over her shoulder at the approaching oarsman. "I think it will be safer to remain in your boat," she said.

"Oh, it will be entirely safe," he replied bitterly.

"Mr. Merriweather must have seen you carrying me."

"That's another thing which I can't help."

"Mr. Scofield," she began softly.

He arrested his oars, and turned wondering eyes to hers. They were sparkling with mirth as she continued, "Are you satisfied that a certain young woman whom you once watched very narrowly is entirely to your mind?"

He caught her mirthful glance and misunderstood her. With dignity he answered, "I'm not the first man who blundered to his cost, though probably it would have made no difference. You must do me the justice, however, to admit that I did not maintain the role of observer very long,—that I wooed you so openly that every one was aware of my suit. Is it not a trifle cruel to taunt me after I had made such ample amends?"

"I was thinking of Mr. Merriweather—"

"Undoubtedly."

"Since he has seen me with my arm around your neck,—you know I couldn't help it,—perhaps he might row the other way if—if—well, if he saw you—what shall I say—sitting over here—by me—or— Somehow I don't feel very hungry, and I wouldn't mind spending another hour—"

Scofield nearly upset the boat in his precipitous effort to gain a seat beside her—and Mr. Merriweather did row another way.

SUSIE ROLLIFFE'S CHRISTMAS.

PICNICKING in December would be a dreary experience even it one could command all the appliances of comfort which outdoor life permitted. This would be especially true in the latitude of Boston and on the bleak hills overlooking that city and its environing waters. Dreary business indeed Ezekiel Watkins regarded it as he shivered over the smoky camp-fire which he maintained with difficulty. The sun was sinking into the southwest so early in the day that he remarked irritably,

"Durned if it was worth while for it to rise at all."

Ezekiel Watkins, or Zeke, as he was generally known among his comrades, had ceased to be a resident on that rocky hillside from pleasure. His heart was in a Connecticut valley in more senses than one; and there was not a more homesick soldier in the army. It will be readily guessed that the events of our story occurred more than a century ago. The shots fired at Bunker Hill had echoed in every nook and corner of the New England colonies, and the heart of Zeke Watkins, among thousands of others, had been fired with military ardor. With companions in like frame of mind he had trudged to Boston, breathing slaughter and extermination against the red-coated instruments of English tyranny. To Zeke the expedition had many of the elements of an extended bear-hunt, much exalted. There was a spice of

danger and a rich promise of novelty and excitement. The march to the lines about Boston had been a continuous ovation; grandsires came out from the wayside dwellings and blessed the rustic soldiers; they were dined profusely by the housewives, and if not wined, there had been slight stint in New-England rum and cider; the apple-cheeked daughters of the land gave them the meed of heroes in advance, and abated somewhat of their ruddy hues at the thought of the dangers to be incurred. Zeke was visibly dilated by all this attention, incense, and military glory; and he stepped forth from each village and hamlet as if the world were scarcely large enough for the prowess of himself and companions. Even on parade he was as stiff as his long-barrelled flintlock, looking as if England could hope for no quarter at his hands; yet he permitted no admiring glances from bright eyes to escape

him. He had not traversed half the distance between his native hamlet and Boston before he was abundantly satisfied that pretty Susie Rolliffe had made no mistake in honoring him among the recruits by marks of special favor. He wore in his squirrel-skin cap the bit of blue ribbon she had given him, and with the mein of a Homeric hero had intimated darkly that it might be crimson before she saw it again. She had clasped her hands, stifled a little sob, and looked at him admiringly. He needed no stronger assurance than her eyes conveyed at that moment. She had been shy and rather unapproachable before, sought by others than himself, yet very chary of her smiles and favors to all. Her ancestors had fought the Indians, and had bequeathed to the demure little maiden much of their own indomitable spirit. She had never worn her heart on her sleeve, and was shy of her

rustic admirers chiefly because none of them had realized her ideals of manhood created by fireside stories of the past.

Zeke's chief competitor for Susie's favor had been Zebulon Jarvis; and while he had received little encouragement, he laid his unostentatious devotions at her feet unstintedly, and she knew it. Indeed, she was much inclined to laugh at him, for he was singularly bashful, and a frown from her overwhelmed him. Unsophisticated Susie reasoned that any one who could be so afraid of *her* could not be much of a man. She had never heard of his doing anything bold and spirited. It might be said, indeed, that the attempt to wring a livelihood for his widowed mother and for his younger brothers and sisters from the stumpy, rocky farm required courage of the highest order; but it was not of a kind that appealed to the fancy of a romantic young girl.

Nothing finer or grander had Zebulon attempted before the recruiting officer came to Opinquake, and when he came, poor Zeb appeared to hang back so timorously that he lost what little place he had in Susie's thoughts. She was ignorant of the struggle taking place in his loyal heart. More intense even than his love for her was the patriotic fire that smouldered in his breast; yet when other young men were giving in their names and drilling on the village green, he was absent. To the war appeals of those who sought him, he replied briefly, "Can't leave till fall."

"But the fighting will be over long before that," it was urged.

"So much the better for others, then, if not for me."

Zeke Watkins made it his business that Susie should hear this reply in the abbreviated form of, "So much the better, then."

She had smiled scornfully, and it

must be added, a little bitterly. In his devotion Zeb had been so helpless, so diffidently unable to take his own part and make advances that she, from odd little spasms of sympathy, had taken his part for him, and laughingly repeated to herself in solitude all the fine speeches which she perceived he would be glad to make. But, as has been intimated, it seemed to her droll indeed that such a great stalwart fellow should appear panic-stricken in her diminutive presence. In brief, he had been timidity embodied under her demurely-mischievous blue eyes; and now that the recruiting officer had come and marched away with his squad without him, she felt incensed that such a chicken-hearted fellow had dared to lift his eyes to her.

"It would go hard with the widow Jarvis and all those children if Zeb 'listed," Susie's mother had ventured in half-hearted defense, for did she

not look upon him as a promising suitor.

"The people of Opinquake wouldn't let the widow or the children starve," replied Susie, indignantly. "If I was a big fellow like him, my country would not call me twice. Think how grandfather left grandma and all the children!"

"Well, I guess Zeb thinks he has his hands full, wrastling with that stony farm."

"He needn't come to see me any more, or steel glances at me 'tween meetings on Sunday," said the girl, decisively. "He cuts a sorry figure beside Zeke Watkins, who was the first to give in his name, and who began to march like a soldier even before he left us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Rolliffe; "Zeke was very forward. If he holds out as he begun — Well, well, Zeke allus was a little forward, and able to speak for himself. You are young yet,

Susan, and may learn before you reach my years that the race isn't allus to the swift. Don't be in a haste to promise yourself to any of the young men."

"Little danger of my promising myself to a man who is afraid even of me! I want a husband like grandfather. He was n't afraid to face anything, and he honored his wife by acting as if she was n't afraid either."

Zeb gave Susie no chance to bestow the rebuffs she had premeditated. He had been down to witness the departure of the Opinquake quota, and had seen Susie's farewell to Zeke Watkins. How much it had meant he was not sure,—enough to leave no hope or chance for him, he had believed; but he had already fought his first battle, and it had been a harder one than Zeke Watkins or any of his comrades would ever engage in. He had returned and worked on

the stony farm until dark. From dawn until dark he continued to work every secular day till September.

His bronzed face grew as stern as it was thin; and since he would no longer look at her, Susie Rolliffe began to steal an occasional and wondering glance at him "'tween meetings."

No one understood the young man or knew his plans except his patient, sad-eyed mother, and she learned more by her intuitions than from his spoken words. She idolized him, and he loved and revered her; but the terrible Puritan restraint paralyzed manifestations of affection. She was not taken by surprise when one evening he said quietly, "Mother, I guess I'll start in a day or two."

She could not repress a sort of gasping sob however, but after a few moments was able to say steadily, "I supposed you were preparing to leave us."

"Yes, mother, I've been a-preparing. I've done my best to gather in everything that would help keep you and the children and the stock through the winter. The corn is all shocked, and the older children can help you husk it, and gather in the pumpkins, the beans, and the rest. As soon as I finish digging the potatoes I think I'll feel better to be in the lines around Boston. I'd have liked to have gone at first, but in order to fight as I ought I'd want to remember there was plenty to keep you and the children."

"I'm afraid, Zebulon, you've been fighting as well as working so hard all summer long. For my sake and the children's, you've been letting Susan Rolliffe think meanly of you."

"I can't help what she thinks, mother; I've tried not to act meanly."

"Perhaps the God of the widow and the fatherless will shield and bless you, my son. Be that as it

may," she added with a heavy sigh, "conscience and His will must guide in everything. If He says go forth to battle, what am I that I should stay you?" Although she did not dream of the truth, the widow Jarvis was a disciplined soldier herself. To her, faith meant unquestioning submission and obedience; she had been taught to revere a jealous and exacting God rather than a loving one. The heroism with which she pursued her toilsome, narrow, shadowed pathway was as sublime as it was unrecognized on her part. After she had retired she wept sorely, not only because her eldest child was going to danger, and perhaps death, but also for the reason that her heart clung to him so weakly and selfishly, as she believed. With a tenderness of which she was half-ashamed she filled his wallet with provisions which would add to his comfort, then, both to his surprise and her own, kissed

him good-bye. He left her and the younger brood with an aching heart of which there was little outward sign, and with no loftier ambition than to do his duty; she followed him with deep, wistful eyes till he, and next the long barrel of his rifle, disappeared in an angle of the road, and then her interrupted work was resumed.

Susie Rolliffe was returning from an errand to a neighbor's when she heard the sound of long rapid steps.

A hasty glance revealed Zeb in something like pursuit. Her heart fluttered slightly, for he had looked so stern and sad of late that she had felt a little sorry for him in spite of herself. But since he could "wrastle" with nothing more formidable than a stony farm, she did not wish to have anything to say to him, or meet the embarrassment of explaining a tacit estrangement. She was glad, therefore, that her gate

was so near, and passed in as if she had not recognized him. She heard his steps become slower and pause at the gate, and then almost in shame in being guilty of too marked discourtesy, she turned to speak, but hesitated in surprise, for now she recognized his equipment as a soldier

"Why, Mr. Jarvis, where are you going?" she exclaimed.

A dull red flamed through the bronze of his thin cheeks as he replied awkwardly, "I thought I'd take a turn in the lines around Boston."

"Oh, yes," she replied mischievously, "take a turn in the lines. Then we may expect you back by corn-husking?"

He was deeply wounded, and in his embarrassment could think of no other reply than the familiar words, "'Let not him that girdeth on his

harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.' "

"I can't help hoping, Mr. Jarvis, that neither you nor others will put it off too soon, — not, at least, while King George claims to be our master. When we're free I can stand any amount of boasting."

"You'll never hear boasting from me Miss Susie;" and then an awkward silence fell between them.

Shyly and swiftly she raised her eyes. He looked so humble, deprecatory, and unsoldierlike that she could not repress a laugh. "I'm not a British cannon," she began "that you should be so fearful."

His manhood was now too deeply wounded for further endurance even from her, for he suddenly straightened himself, and throwing his rifle over his shoulder, said sternly, "I'm not a coward. I never hung back from fear, but to keep mother from charity, so I could fight or die as

God wills. You may laugh at the man who never gave you anything but love, if you will, but you shall never laugh at my deeds. Call that boasting or not as you please," and he turned on his heel to depart.

His words and manner almost took away the girl's breath, so unexpected were they, and unlike her idea of the man. In that brief moment a fearless soldier had flashed himself upon her consciousness, revealing a spirit that would flinch at nothing, —that had not even quailed at the necessity of forfeiting her esteem, that his mother might not want. Humiliated and conscience-stricken that she had done him so much injustice, she rushed forward, crying, "Stop, Zebulon; please do not go away angry with me! I do not forget that we have been old friends and playmates. I'm willing to own that I've been wrong about you, and that's a good deal for a girl to do. I only wish I

were a man, and I 'd go with you." Her kindness restored him to his awkward self again, and he stammered, "I wish you were—no, I don't —I merely stopped, thinking you might have a message; but I 'd rather not take any to Zeke Watkins,—will, though, if you wish. It cut me all up to have you think I was afraid," and then he became speechless.

"But you acted as if you were afraid of me, and that seemed so ridiculous."

He looked at her a moment so earnestly with his dark, deep-set eyes, that her's dropped. "Miss Susie," he said slowly, and speaking with difficulty, "I *am* afraid of you, next to God. I don't suppose I 've any right to talk to you so, and I will say good-by. I was reckless when I spoke before. Perhaps—you 'll go and see mother. My going is hard on her."

His eyes lingered on her a moment

longer, as if he were taking his last look, then he turned slowly away.

"Good-by, Zeb," she called softly. "I didn't—I don't understand. Yes, I will go to see your mother."

Susie also watched him as he strode away. He thought he could continue on steadfastly without looking back, but when the road turned he also turned, fairly tugged right about by his loyal heart. She stood where he had left her, and promptly waived her hand. He doffed his cap and remained a moment in an attitude that appeared to her reverential, then passed out of view.

The moments lapsed, and still she stood in the gateway, looking down the vacant road as if dazed. Was it in truth awkward, bashful Zeb Jarvis who had just left her? He seemed a new and distinct being in contrast to the youth whom she had smiled at and in a measure scoffed at. The little Puritan maiden was

not a reasoner, but a creature of impressions and swift intuitions. Zeb had not set his teeth, faced his hard duty, and toiled that long summer in vain. He had developed a manhood and a force which in one brief moment had enabled him to compel her recognition.

"He will face anything," she murmured. "He 's afraid of only God and me; what a strange thing to say, —afraid of me next to God! Sounds kind of wicked. What can he mean? Zeke Watkins was n't a bit afraid of me. As mother said, he was a little forward, and I was fool enough to take him at his own valuation. Afraid of me! How he stood with his cap off! Do men ever love so? Is there a kind of reverence in some men's love? How absurd that a great strong, brave man, ready to face cannons, can bow down to such a little —" Her fragmentary exclamations

ended in a peal of laughter, but tears dimmed her blue eyes.

Susie did visit Mrs. Jarvis, and although the reticent woman said little about her son, what she did say meant volumes to the girl who now had the right clew in interpreting his action and character. She too was reticent. New-England girls rarely gushed in those days, so no one knew she was beginning to understand. Her eyes, experienced in country work, were quick, and her mind active. "It looks as if a giant had been wrestling with this stony farm," she muttered.

Zeb received no ovations on his lonely tramp to the lines, and the vision of Susie Rolliffe waving her hand from the gateway would have blinded him to all the bright and admiring eyes in the world. He was hospitably entertained, however, when there was occasion; but the advent of men bound for the army

had become an old story. Having at last inquired his way to the position occupied by the Connecticut troops, he was assigned to duty in the same company with Zeke Watkins, who gave him but a cool reception, and sought to overawe him by veteran-like airs. At first poor Zeb was awkward enough in his unaccustomed duties, and no laugh was so scornful as that of his rival. Young Jarvis, however, had not been many days in camp before he guessed that Zeke's star was not in the ascendant. There was but little fighting required, but much digging of intrenchments, drill, and monotonous picket duty. Zeke did not take kindly to such tasks, and shirked them when possible. He was becoming known as the champion grumbler in the mess, and no one escaped his criticism, not even "Old Put,"—as General Putnam, who commanded the Connecticut quota, was called. Jarvis, on the

other hand, performed his military duties as he had worked the farm, and rapidly acquired the bearing of a soldier. Indomitable Putnam gave his men little rest, and was ever seeking to draw his lines nearer to Boston and the enemy's ships. He virtually fought with pick and shovel, and his working parties were often exposed to fire while engaged in fortifying the positions successively occupied. The Opinquake boys regarded themselves as well seasoned to such rude compliments, and were not a little curious to see how Zeb would handle a shovel with cannon-balls whizzing uncomfortably near. The opportunity soon came. Old Put himself could not have been more coolly oblivious than the raw recruit. At last a ball smashed his shovel to smithereens; he quietly procured another and went on with his work. Then his former neighbors gave him a cheer, while his captain clapped him

on the shoulder and said, "Promote you to be a veteran on the spot!"

The days had grown shorter, colder, and drearier, and the discomforts of camp-life harder to endure. There were few tents even for the officers, and the men were compelled to improvise such shelter as circumstances permitted. Huts of stone, wood, and brush, and barricades against the wind, lined the hillside, and the region already was denuded of almost everything that would burn. Therefore, when December came, Zeke Watkins found that even a fire was a luxury not to be had without trouble. He had become thoroughly disgusted with a soldier's life, and the military glory which had at first so dazzled him now wore the aspect of the wintry sky. He had recently sought and attained the only promotion for which his captain now deemed him fitted, —that of cook for about a dozen of his comrades; and the close of the

December day found him preparing the meagre supper which the limited rations permitted. By virtue of his office, Zeke was one of the best-fed men in the army, for if there were any choice morsels he could usually manage to secure them; still, he was not happy. King George and Congress were both pursuing policies inconsistent with his comfort, and he sighed more and more frequently for the wide-kitchen hearth of his home, which was within easy visiting distance of the Rolliffe farm-house. His term of enlistment expired soon, and he was already counting the days. He was not alone in his discontent, for there was much homesickness and disaffection among the Connecticut troops. Many had already departed, unwilling to stay an hour after the expiration of their terms; and not a few had anticipated the periods which legally released them from duty. The organization of the

army was so loose that neither appeals nor threats had much influence, and Washington, in deep solicitude, saw his troops melting away.

It was dark by the time the heavy tramp of the working party was heard returning from the fortifications. The great mess-pot, partly filled with pork and beans, was bubbling over the fire; Zeke, shifting his position from time to time to avoid the smoke which the wind, as if it had a spite against him, blew in his face, was sourly contemplating his charge and his lot, bent on grumbling to the others with even greater gusto than he had complained to himself. His comrades carefully put away their intrenching tools, for they were held responsible for them, and then gathered about the fire, clamoring for supper.

"Zeke, you lazy loon," cried Nat Atkinson, "how many pipes have you smoked to-day? If you'd smoke less and forage and dun the commis-

sary more, we'd have a little fresh meat once in a hundred years."

"Yes, just about once in a hundred years!" snarled Zeke.

"*You* find something to keep fat on, anyhow. We'll broil you some cold night. Trot out your beans if there's nothing else."

"Growl away," retorted Zeke. "'T won't be long before I'll be eating chickens and pumpkin-pie in Opinquake, instead of cooking beans and rusty pork for a lot of hungry wolves."

"You'd be the hungriest wolf of the lot if you'd 'a been picking and shovelling frozen ground all day."

"I didn't 'list to be a ditch-digger!" said Zeke. "I thought I was going to be a soldier."

"And you turned out a cook!" quietly remarked Zeb Jarvis.

"Well, my hero of the smashed shovel, what do you expect to be,—Old Put's successor? You know, fellows, it's settled that you're to dig

your way into Boston, tunnel under the water when you come to it. Of course Put will die of old age before you get half there. Zeb 'll be the chap of all others to command a division of shovellers. I see you with a pickaxe strapped on your side instead of a sword."

"Lucky I 'm not in command now," replied Zeb, "or you 'd shovel dirt under fire to the last hour of your enlistment. I 'd give grumblers like you something to grumble about. See here, fellows, I 'm sick of this seditious talk in our mess. The Connecticut men are getting to be the talk of the army. You heard a squad of New-Hampshire boys jeer at us today, and ask, 'When are ye going home to mother?' You ask, Zeke Watkins, what I expect to be. I expect to be a soldier, and obey orders as long as Old Put and General Washington want a man. All I ask is to be home summers long enough to

keep mother and the children off the town. Now what do you expect to be after you give up your cook's ladle?"

"None o' your business."

"He's going home to court Susie Rolliffe," cried Nat Atkinson. "They'll be married in the spring, and go into the chicken business. That'd just suit Zeke."

"It would not suit Susie Rolliffe," said Zeb, hotly. "A braver, better girl doesn't breathe in the colonies, and the man that says a slurring word against her's got to fight me."

"What! Has she given Zeke the mitten for your sake, Zeb?" piped little Hiram Woodbridge.

"She has n't given me anything, and I 've got no claim; but she is the kind of girl that every fellow from Opinquake should stand up for. We all know that there is nothing chicken-hearted about her."

"Right, by George,—George W., I

mean, and not the king," responded Hiram Woodbridge. "Here 's to her health, Zeb, and your success! I believe she'd rather marry a soldier than a cook."

"Thank you," said Zeb. "You stand as good a chance as I do; but don't let's bandy her name about in camp any more'n we would our mothers'. The thing for us to do now is to show that the men from Connecticut have as much backbone as any other fellows in the army, North or South. Zeke may laugh at Old Put's digging, but you'll soon find that he'll pick his way to a point where he can give the Britishers a dig under the fifth rib. We've got the best general in the army. Washington, with all his Southern style, believes in him and relies on him. Whether their time's up or not, it 's a burning shame that so many of his troops are sneaking off home."

"It's all very well for you to talk,

Zeb Jarvis," growled Zeke. "You haven't been here very long yet; and you stayed at home when others started out to fight. Now that you've found that digging and not fighting is the order of the day, you 're just suited. It's the line of soldiering you are cut out for. When fighting men and not ditch-diggers are wanted, you'll find me—"

"All right, Watkins," said the voice of Captain Dean from without the circle of light. "According to your own story you are just the kind of man needed to-night,—no ditch-digging on hand, but dangerous service. I detail you, for you've had rest compared with the other men. I ask for volunteers from those who've been at work all day."

Zeb Jarvis was on his feet instantly, and old Ezra Stokes also began to rise with difficulty. "No, Stokes," resumed the officer, "you can't go. I know you've suffered with the rheu-

matism all day, and have worked well in spite of it. For to-night's work I want young fellows with good legs and your spirit. How is it you're here anyhow, Stokes? Your time's up."

"We ain't into Boston yet," was the quiet reply.

"So you want to stay?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you shall cook for the men till you're better. I won't keep so good a soldier, though, at such work any longer than I can help. Your good example and that of the gallant Watkins has brought out the whole squad. I think I'll put Jarvis in command, though; Zeke might be rash, and attempt the capture of Boston before morning;" and the facetious captain, who had once been a neighbor, concluded, "Jarvis, see that every man's piece is primed and ready for use. Be at my hut in fifteen

minutes." Then he passed on to the other camp-fires.

In a few minutes Ezra Stokes was alone by the fire, almost roasting his lame leg, and grumbling from pain and the necessity of enforced inaction. He was a taciturn, middle-aged man, and had been the only bachelor of mature years in Opinquake. Although he rarely said much, he had been a great listener, and no one had been better versed in neighborhood affairs. In brief, he had been the village cobbler, and had not only taken the measure of Susie Rolliffe's little foot, but also of her spirit. Like herself he had been misled at first by the forwardness of Zeke Watkins and the apparent backwardness of Jarvis. Actual service had changed his views very decidedly. When Zeb appeared he had watched the course of this bashful suitor with interest which had rapidly ripened into warm but unde-

monstrative good-will. The young fellow had taken pains to relieve the older man, had carried his tools for him, and more than once with his strong hands had almost rubbed the rheumatism out of the indomitable cobbler's leg. He had received but slight thanks, and had acted as if he didn't care for any. Stokes was not a man to return favors in words; he brooded over his gratitude as if it were a grudge. "I'll get even with that young Jarvis yet," he muttered, as he nursed his leg over the fire. "I know he worships the ground that little Rolliffe girl treads on, though she don't tread on much at a time. She never trod on me nuther, though I've had her foot in my hand more'n once. She looked at the man that made her shoes as if she would like to make him happier. When a little tot, she used to say I could come and live with her when I got too old to take care of myself. Lame as

I be, I'd walk to Opinquake to give her a hint in her choosin'. Guess Hi Woodbridge is right, and she wouldn't be long in making up her mind betwixt a soger and a cook,—a mighty poor one at that. Somehow or nuther I must let her know before Zeke Watkins sneaks home and parades around as a soldier 'bove ditch-digging. I've taken his measure.

"He'll be putting on veteran airs, telling big stories of what he's going to do when soldiers are wanted, and drilling such fools as believe in him. Young gals are often taken by such strutters, and think that men like Jarvis who darsn't speak for themselves are of no account. But I'll put a spoke in Zeke's wheel, if I have to get the captain to write."

It thus may be gathered that the cobbler had much to say to himself when alone, though so taciturn to others.

The clouds along the eastern horizon were stained with red before the reconnoitering party returned. Stokes had managed, by hobbling about, to keep up the fire and to fill the mess-kettle with the inevitable pork and beans. The hungry, weary men therefore gave their new cook a cheer when they saw the good fire and provision awaiting them. A moment later, however, Jarvis observed how lame Stokes had become; he took the cobbler by the shoulder and sat him down in the warmest nook, saying, "I'll be assistant cook until you are better. As Zeke says, I'm a wolf sure enough; but as soon's the beast's hunger is satisfied, I'll rub that leg of yours till you'll want to dance a jig;" and with the ladle wrung from Stoke's reluctant hand, he began stirring the seething contents of the kettle.

Then little Hi Woodbridge piped in his shrill voice, "Another cheer for

our assistant cook and ditch-digger! I say, Zeke, wouldn't you like to tell Ezra that Zeb has showed himself fit for something more than digging? You expressed your opinion very plain last night, and may have a different one now."

Zeke growled something inaudible, and stalked to his hut in order to put away his equipments.

"I'm cook-in-chief yet," Stokes declared; "and not a bean will any of you get till you report all that happened."

"Well," piped Hi, "you may stick a feather in your old cap, Ezra, for our Opinquake lad captured a British officer last night, and Old Put is pumping him this blessed minute."

"Well, well; that is news. It must have been Zeke who did that neat job," exclaimed Stokes, ironically; "he's been a-pining for the soldier business."

"No, no; Zeke 's above such night

scrimmages. He wants to swim the bay and walk right into Boston in broad daylight, so everybody can see him. Come Zeb, tell how it happened. It was so confounded dark, no one can tell but you."

"There is n't much to tell that you fellows don't know," was Zeb's laconic answer. We had sneaked down on the neck so close to the enemy's lines— "

"Yes, yes, Zeb Jarvis," interrupted Stokes, "that's the kind of sneaking you're up to,—close to the enemy's lines. Go on."

"Well, I crawled up so close that I saw a Britisher going the round of the sentinels, and I pounced on him and brought him out on the run, that's all."

"Oho! you both ran away, then? That wasn't good soldiering either, was it, Zeke?" commented Stokes, in his dry way.

"It's pretty good soldiering to stand

fire within an inch of your nose," resumed Hi, who had become a loyal friend and adherent of his tall comrade. "Zeb was so close on the Britisher when he fired his pistol that we saw the faces of both in the flash; and a lot of bullets sung after us, I can tell you, as we dusted out of those diggin's."

"Compliments of General Putnam to Sergeant Zebulon Jarvis," said an orderly riding out of the dim twilight of the morning. "The general requests your presence at headquarters."

"Sergeant! promoted! Another cheer for Zeb!" and the Opinquake boys gave it with hearty good-will.

"Jerusalem, fellows! I'd like to have a chance at those beans before I go!" but Zeb promptly tramped off with the orderly.

When he returned he was subjected to a fire of questions by the two or three men still awake, but all they

could get out of him was that he had been given a good breakfast. From Captain Dean, who was with the general at the time of the examination, it leaked out that Zeb was in the line of promotion to a rank higher than that of sergeant.

The next few days passed uneventfully; and Zeke was compelled to resume the pick and shovel again. Stokes did his best to fulfil his duties, but it had become evident to all that the exposure of camp would soon disable him utterly. Jarvis and Captain Dean persuaded him to go home for the winter, and the little squad raised a sum which enabled him to make the journey in a stage. Zeke, sullen toward his jeering comrades, but immensely elated in secret, had shaken the dust — snow and slush rather — of camp-life from his feet the day before. He had the grace to wait till the time of his enlistment

expired, and that was more than could be said of many.

It spoke well for the little Opinquake quota that only two others besides Zeke availed themselves of their liberty. Poor Stokes was almost forced away consoled by the hope of returning in the spring. Zeb was sore-hearted on the day of Zeke's departure. His heart was in the Connecticut Valley also. No message had come to him from Susie Rolliffe. Those were not the days of swift and frequent communication. Even Mrs. Jarvis had written but seldom, and her missives were brief. Mother-love glowed through the few quaint and scriptural phrases like heat in anthracite coals. All that poor Zeb could learn from them was that Susie Rolliffe had kept her word and had been to the farm more than once; but the girl had been as reticent as the mother. Zeke was now on his way home to prosecute his suit in

person, and Zeb well knew how forward and plausible he could be. There was no deed of daring that he would not promise to perform after spring opened, and Zeb reasoned gloomily that a present lover, impassioned and importunate, would stand a better chance than an absent one who had never been able to speak for himself.

When it was settled that Stokes should return to Opinquake, Zeb determined that he would not give up the prize to Zeke without one decisive effort; and as he was rubbing the cobbler's leg, he stammered, "I say, Ezra, will you do me a turn? 'Twon't be so much, what I ask, except that I'll like you to keep mum about it, and you're a good hand at keeping mum."

"I know what yer driving at, Zeb. Write yer letter and I'll deliver it with my own hands."

"Well, now I'm satisfied, I can

stay on and fight it out with a clear mind. When Zeke marched away last summer, I thought it was all up with me; and I can tell you that any fighting that's to do about Boston will be fun compared with the fighting I did while hoeing corn and mowing grass. But I don't believe that Susie Rolliffe is promised to Zeke Watkins, or any one else yet, and I'm going to give her a chance to refuse me plump."

"That's the way to do it, Zeb," said the bachelor cobbler, with an emphasis that would indicate much successful experience. "Asking a girl plump is like standing up in a fair fight. It gives the girl a chance to bowl you over, if that's her mind, so there can't be any mistake about it; and it seems to me the womenfolks ought to have all the chances that in any way belong to them. They have got few enough anyhow."

"And you think it'll end in my being bowled over?"

"How should I know, or you either, unless you make a square trial? You're such a strapping, fighting fellow that nothing but a cannon-ball or a woman ever will knock you off your pins."

"See here, Ezra Stokes, the girl of my heart may refuse me just as plump as I offer myself; and if that's her mind she has a right to do it. But I don't want either you or her to think I won't stand on my feet. I won't even fight any more recklessly than my duty requires. I have a mother to take care of, even if I never have a wife."

"I'll put in a few pegs right along to keep in mind what you say; and I'll give you a fair show by seeing to it that the girl gets your letter before Zeke can steal a march on you."

"That's all I ask," said Zeb, with compressed lips. "She shall choose

between us. It's hard enough to write, but it will be a sight easier than facing her. Not a word of this to another soul, Ezra; but I'm not going to use you like a mail-carrier, but a friend. After all, there are few in Opinquake, I suppose, but know I'd give my eyes for her, so there isn't much use of my putting on secret airs."

"I'm not a talker, and you might have sent your letter by a worse messenger'n me," was the laconic reply.

Zeb had never written a love-letter, and was at a loss how to begin or end it. But time pressed, and he had to say what was uppermost in his mind. It ran as follows:—

"I don't know how to write so as to give my words weight. I cannot come home; I will not come as long as mother and the children can get on without me. And men are needed here; men *are* needed. The general fairly pleads with the soldiers to stay. Stokes would stay if he could. We're almost driving him home. I know you

will be kind to him, and remember he has few to care for him. I cannot speak for myself in person very soon, if ever. Perhaps I could not if I stood before you. You laugh at me; but if you knew how I love you and remember you, how I honor and almost worship you in my heart, you might understand me better. Why is it strange I should be afraid of you? Only God has more power over me than you. Will you be my wife? I will do anything to win you that *you* can ask. Others will plead with you in person. Will you let this letter plead for the absent?"

Zeb went to the captain's quarters and got some wax with which to seal this appeal, then saw Stokes depart with the feeling that his destiny was now at stake.

Meanwhile Zeke Watkins, with a squad of homeward-bound soldiers, was trudging toward Opinquake. They soon began to look into one another's faces in something like dismay. But little provision was in their wallets when they had started, for there was little to draw upon, and

that furnished grudgingly, as may well be supposed. Zeke had not cared. He remembered the continuous feasting that had attended his journey to camp, and supposed that he would only have to present himself to the roadside farm-houses in order to enjoy the fat of the land. This hospitality he proposed to repay abundantly by camp reminiscences in which it would not be difficult to insinuate that the hero of the scene was present.

In contrast to these rose-hued expectations, doors were slammed in their faces, and they were treated little better than tramps. "I suppose the people near Boston have been called on too often and imposed on too," Zeke reasoned rather ruefully. "When we once get over the Connecticut border we'll begin to find ourselves at home;" and spurred by hunger and cold, as well as hope, they pushed on desperately, subsisting on such coarse provisions as they

could obtain, sleeping in barns when it stormed, and not infrequently by a fire in the woods. At last they passed the Connecticut border, and led by Zeke they urged their way to a large farm-house, at which, but a few months before, the table had groaned under rustic dainties, and feather-beds had luxuriously received the weary recruits bound to the front. They approached the opulent farm in the dreary dark of the evening, and pursued by a biting east wind laden with snow. Not only the weather, but the very dogs seemed to have a spite against them; and the family had to rush out to call them off.

"Weary soldiers ask for shelter," began Zeke.

"Of course you're bound for the lines," said the matronly housewife. "Come in."

Zeke thought they would better enter at once, before explaining; and truly the large kitchen, with a great

fire blazing on the hearth, seemed like heaven. The door leading into the family sitting-room was open, and there was another fire, with the red-cheeked girls and the white-haired grandsire before it, their eyes turned expectantly toward the new-comers. Instead of hearty welcome, there was a questioning look on every face, even on that of the kitchen-maid. Zeke's four companions had a sort of hang-dog look,—for they had been cowed by the treatment received along the road; but he tried to bear himself confidently, and began with an insinuating smile, "Perhaps I should hardly expect you to remember me. I passed this way last summer—"

"Passed this way last summer?" repeated the matron, her face growing stern. "We who cannot fight are ready and glad to share all we have with those who fight for us. Since you carry arms we might very

justly think you are hastening forward to use them."

"These are our own arms; we furnished them ourselves," Zeke hastened to say.

"Oh, indeed," replied the matron, coldly; "I supposed that not only the weapons, but the ones who carry them, belong to the country. I hope you are not deserting from the army."

"I assure you we are not. Our terms of enlistment have expired."

"And your country's need was over at the same moment? Are you hastening home at this season to plough and sow and reap?"

"Well, madam, after being away so long we felt like having a little comfort and seeing the folks. We stayed as long as we agreed. When spring opens, or before, if need be—"

"Pardon me, sir; the need is now. The country is not to be saved by men who make bargains like day-

laborers, and who quit when the hour is up, but by soldiers who give themselves to their country as they would to their wives and sweethearts. My husband and sons are in the army you have deserted. General Washington has written to our governor asking whether an example should not be made of the men who have deserted the cause of their country at this critical time when the enemy are receiving re-enforcements. We are told that Connecticut men have brought disgrace on our colony and have imperilled the whole army. You feel like taking comfort and seeing the folks. The folks do not feel like seeing you. My husband and the brave men in the lines are in all the more danger because of your desertion, for a soldier's time never expires when the enemy is growing stronger and threatening every home in the land. If all followed your example, the British would soon be

upon your heels, taking from us our honor and our all. We are not ignorant of the critical condition of our army; and I can tell you, sir, that if many more of our men come home, the women will take their places."

Zeke's companions succumbed to the stern arraignment, and after a brief whispered consultation one spoke for the rest. "Madam," he said, "you put it in a way that we hadn't realized before. We 'll right-about-face and march back in the morning, for we feel that we 'd rather face all the British in Boston than any more Connecticut women."

"Then, sirs, you shall have supper and shelter and welcome," was the prompt reply.

Zeke assumed an air of importance as he said, "There are reasons why I must be at home for a time, but I not only expect to return, but also to take many back with me."

"I trust your deeds may prove as

large as your words," was the chilly reply; and then he was made to feel that he was barely tolerated. Some hints from his old associates added to the disfavor which the family took but little pains to conceal. There was a large vein of selfish calculation in Zeke's nature, and he was not to be swept away by any impulses. He believed he could have a prolonged visit home, yet manage so admirably that when he returned he would be followed by a squad of recruits, and chief of all he would be the triumphant suitor of Susie Rolliffe. Her manner in parting had satisfied him that he had made so deep an impression that it would be folly not to follow it up. He trudged the remainder of the journey alone, and secured tolerable treatment by assuring the people that he was returning for recruits for the army. He reached home in the afternoon of Christmas; and although the day was

almost completely ignored in the Puritan household, yet Mrs. Watkins forgot country, Popery, and all, in her mother-love, and Zeke supped on the finest turkey of the flock. Old Mr. Watkins, it is true, looked rather grim, but the reception had been reassuring in the main; and Zeke had resolved on a line of tactics which would make him, as he believed, the military hero of the town. After he had satisfied an appetite which had been growing ever since he left camp, he started to call on Susie in all the bravery of his best attire, filled with sanguine expectations inspired by memories of the past and recent potations of cider.

Meanwhile Susie had received a guest earlier in the day. The stage had stopped at the gate where she had stood in the September sunshine and waved her bewildered farewell to Zeb. There was no bewilderment or surprise now at her strange and un-

wonted sensations. She had learned why she had stood looking after him dazed and spellbound. Under the magic of her own light irony she had seen her drooping rustic lover transformed into the ideal man who could face anything except her unkindness. She had guessed the deep secret of his timidity. It was a kind of fear of which she had not dreamed, and which touched her innermost soul.

When the stage stopped at the gate, and she saw the driver helping out Ezra Stokes, a swift presentiment made her sure that she would hear from one soldier who was more to her than all the generals. She was soon down the walk, the wind sporting in her light-gold hair, supporting the cobbler on the other side.

"Ah, Miss Susie!" he said, "I am about worn out, sole and upper. It breaks my heart, when men are so sorely needed, to be thrown aside like an old shoe."

The girl soothed and comforted him, ensconced him by the fireside, banishing the chill from his heart, while Mrs. Rolliffe warmed his blood by a strong, hot drink. Then the mother hastened away to get dinner, while Susie sat down near, nervously twisting and untwisting her fingers, with questions on her lips which she dared not utter, but which brought blushes to her cheeks. Stokes looked at her and sighed over his lost youth, yet smiled as he thought. "Guess I'll get even with that Zeb Jarvis to-day." Then he asked, "Isn't there any one you would like to hear about in camp?"

She blushed deeper still, and named every one who had gone from Opinquake except Zeb. At last she said a little ironically, "I suppose Ezekiel Watkins is almost thinking about being a general about this time?"

"Hasn't he been here telling you what he is thinking about?"

"Been here! Do you mean to say he has come home?"

"He surely started for home. All the generals and a yoke of oxen couldn't 'a' keep him in camp, he was so homesick, lovesick too, I guess. Powerful compliment to you, Miss Susie," added the politic cobbler, feeling his way, "that you could draw a man straight from his duty like one of these 'ere stump-extractors."

"No compliment to me at all!" cried the girl, indignantly. "He little understands me who seeks my favor by coming home at a time like this. The Connecticut women are up in arms at the way our men are coming home. No offense to you, Mr. Stokes. You're sick, and should come; but I'd like to go myself to show some of the strong young fellows what we think of them."

"Coming home was worse than rheumatism to me, and I'm going

back soon's I kin walk without a cane. Wouldn't 'a' come as 't is, if that Zeb Jarvis hadn't jes' packed me off. By Jocks! I thought you and he was acquainted, but you don't seem to ask arter him."

"I felt sure he would try—I heard he was doing his duty," she replied with averted face.

"Zeke Watkins says he's no soldier at all,—nothing but a dirt-digger."

For a moment, as the cobbler had hoped, Susie forgot her blushes and secret in her indignation. "Zeke Watkins indeed!" she exclaimed. "He'd better not tell *me* any such story. I don't believe there's a braver, truer man in the— Well," she added in sudden confusion, "he hasn't run away and left others to dig their way into Boston, if that's the best way of getting there."

"Ah, I'm going to get even with him yet," chuckled Stokes to himself. "Digging is only the first step, Miss

Susie. When Old Put gets good and ready, you'll hear the thunder of the guns a'most in Opinquake."

"Well, Mr. Stokes," stammered Susie, resolving desperately on a short cut to the knowledge she craved, "you've seen Mr. Jarvis a-soldiering. What do you think about it?"

"Well, now, that Zeb Jarvis is the sneakin'ist fellow—"

"What?" cried the girl, her face aflame.

"Wait till I get in a few more pegs," continued Stokes, coolly. "The other night he sneaked right into the enemy's lines and carried off a British officer as a hawk takes a chicken. The Britisher fired his pistol right under Zeb's nose; but, law! he didn't mind that any more'n a 'sketer-bite. I call that soldiering, don't you? Anyhow, Old Put thought it was, and sent for him 'fore daylight, and made a sergeant of him. If I had as good a chance of gettin' rid of the rheuma-

tiz as he has of bein' captain in six months, I'd thank the Lord."

Susie sat up very straight, and tried to look severely judicial; but her lip was quivering and her whole plump little form trembling with excitement and emotion. Suddenly she dropped her face in her hands and cried in a gust of tears and laughter, "He's just like grandfather; he'd face anything!"

"Anything in the 'tarnal universe, I guess, 'cept you, Miss Susie. I seed a cannon-ball smash a shovel in his hands, and he got another, and went on with his work cool as a cucumber. Then I seed him writin' a letter to you, and his hand trembled—"

"A letter to me!" cried the girl, springing up.

"Yes; 'ere it is. I was kind of pegging around till I got to that; and you know—"

But Susie was reading, her hands also trembling so she scarcely hold

the paper. "It's about you," she faltered, making one more desperate effort at self-preservation. "He says you'd stay if you could; that they almost drove you home. And he asks that I be kind to you, because there are not many to care for you—and—and—"

"Oh, Lord! never can get even with that Zeb Jarvis," groaned Ezra. "But you needn't tell me that's all the letter 's about."

Her eyes were full of tears, yet not so full but that she saw the plain, closing words in all their significance. Swiftly the letter went to her lips, then was thrust into her bosom, and she seized the cobbler's hand, exclaiming, "Yes, I will! I will! You shall stay with us and be one of us!" and in her excitement she put her left hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"*Susan!*" exclaimed Mrs. Rolliffe, who entered at that moment, and looked aghast at the scene.

"Yes, I *will!*" exclaimed Susie, too wrought up now for restraint.

"Will what?" gasped the mother.

"Be Zebulon Jarvis's wife. He's asked me plump and square, like a soldier; and I'll answer as grandma did, and like grandma I'll face anything for his sake."

"*Well*, this *is* suddent!" exclaimed Mrs. Rolliffe, dropping into a chair. "Susan, do you think it is becoming and seemly for a young woman—"

"Oh, mother dear, there's no use of your trying to make a prim Puritan maiden of me. Zeb doesn't fight like a deacon, and I can't love like one. Ha! ha! ha! to think that great soldier is afraid of little me, and nothing else! It's too funny and heavenly—"

"Susan, I am dumbfounded at your behavior!"

At this moment Mr. Rolliffe came in from the wood-lot and he was dazed by the wonderful news also.

In his eagerness to get even with Zeb, the cobbler enlarged and expatiated till he was hoarse. When he saw that the parents were almost as proud as the daughter over their prospective son-in-law, he relapsed into his old taciturnity, declaring he had talked enough for a month.

Susie, the only child, who apparently had inherited all the fire and spirit of her fighting ancestors, darted out, and soon returned with her rosebud of a face enveloped in a great calyx of a woollen hood.

"Where are you going?" exclaimed her parents.

"You've had the news. I guess Mother Jarvis has the next right." And she was off over the hills with almost the lightness and swiftness of a snowbird.

In due time Zeke appeared, and smiled encourageingly on Mrs. Rolliffe, who sat knitting by the kitchen fire. The matron did not rise, and

gave him but a cool salutation. He discussed the coldness of the weather awkwardly for a few moments, and then ventured, "Is Miss Susan at home?"

"No, sir," replied Mrs. Rolliffe; "she's gone to make a visit to her mother-in-law that is to be, the Widow Jarvis. Ezra Stokes is sittin' in the next room, sent home sick. Perhaps you'd like to talk over camp-life with him."

Not even the cider now sustained Zeke. He looked as if a cannon-ball had wrecked all his hopes and plans instead of a shovel. "Good-evening, Mrs. Rolliffe," he stammered: "I guess I'll—I'll—go home."

Poor Mrs. Jarvis had a spiritual conflict that day which she never forgot. Susie's face had flashed at the window near which she had sat spinning, and sighing perhaps that Nature had not provided feathers or fur for a brood like hers; then the

girl's arms were about her neck, the news was stammered out—for the letter could never be shown to any one—in a way that tore primness to tatters. The widow tried to act as if it were a dispensation of Providence which should be received in solemn gratitude; but before she knew it she was laughing and crying, kissing her sweet-faced daughter, or telling how good and brave Zeb had been when his heart was almost breaking.

Compunction had already seized upon the widow. "Susan," she began, "I fear we are not mortifyin' the flesh as we ought—"

"No mortifying just yet, if you please," cried Susie. "The most important thing of all is yet to be done. Zeb hasn't heard the news; just think of it! You must write and tell him that I'll help you spin the children's clothes and work the farm; that we'll face everything in Opinquake as long as Old Put needs

men. Where is the ink-horn? I'll sharpen a pen for you and one for me, and *such* news as he'll get! Wish I could tell him, though, and see the great fellow tremble once more. Afraid of me! Ha! ha! ha! that's the funniest thing— Why, Mother Jarvis, this is Christmas Day!"

"So it is," said the widow, in an awed tone. "Susie, my heart misgives me that all this should have happened on a day of which Popery has made so much."

"No, no," cried the girl. "Thank God it *is* Christmas! and hereafter I shall keep Christmas as long as love is love and God is good."

JEFF'S TREASURE.

CHAPTER I.

ITS DISCOVERY.

JEFF, the hero of my tale, was as truly a part of the Southern Confederacy as the greater Jeff at Richmond. Indeed, were it not for the humbler Jeff and the class he represented, the other Jeff would never have attained his eminence.

Jeff's prospects were as dark as himself. He owned nothing, not even himself, yet his dream of riches is the motive of my tale. Regarded as a

chattel, for whom a bill of sale would have been made as readily as for a bullock, he proved himself a man and brother by a prompt exhibition of traits too common to human nature when chance and some heroism on his part gave into his hands the semblance of a fortune.

Jeff was a native Virginian and belonged to an F. F. V. in a certain practical, legal sense which thus far had not greatly disturbed his equanimity. His solid physique and full shining face showed that slavery had brought no horrors into his experience. He had indulged, it is true, in vague yearnings for freedom, but these had been checked by hearing that liberty meant "working for Yankees,"—appalling news to his indolent soul. He was house-servant and man-of-all-work in a family whose means had always been limited, and whose men were in the Confederate army. His "misses"

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evinced a sort of weary content when he had been scolded or threatened into the completion of his tasks by nightfall. He then gave her and her daughters some compensation for their trials with him by producing his fiddle and making the warm summer evening resonant with a kind of music which the negro only can evoke. Jeff was an artist, and had a complacent consciousness of the fact. He was a living instance of the truth that artists are born, not made. No knowledge of this gifted class had ever suggested kinship; he did not even know what the word meant, but when his cheek rested lovingly against his violin he felt that he was made of different clay from other "niggahs." During the day he indulged in moods by the divine right and impulse of genius, imitating his gifted brothers unconsciously. In waiting on the table, washing dishes, and hoeing the garden, he was as

great a laggard as Pegasus would have been if compelled to the labors of a cart-horse; but when night came, and uncongenial toil was over, his soul expanded. His corrugated brow unwrinkled itself; his great black fingers flew back and forth over the strings as if driven by electricity; and electric in effect were the sounds produced by his swiftly glancing bow.

While the spirit of music so filled his heart that he could play to the moon and silent stars, an audience inspired him with tenfold power, especially if the floor was cleared or a smooth sward selected for a dance. Rarely did he play long before all who could trip a measure were on their feet, while even the superannuated nodded and kept time, sighing that they were old. His services naturally came into great demand, and he was catholic in granting them,—his mistress in good-natured

tolerance acceding to requests which promised many forgetful hours at a time when the land was shadowed by war. So it happened that Jeff was often at the more pretending residences of the neighborhood, sometimes fiddling in the detached kitchen of a Southern mansion to the shuffle of heavy feet, again in the lighted parlor, especially when Confederate troops were quartered near. It was then that his strains took on their most inspiring and elevated character. He gave wings to the dark-eyed Southern girls; their feet scarcely touched the floor as they whirled with their cavaliers in gray, or threaded the mazes of the cotillion then and there in vogue.

Nor did he disdain an invitation to a cross-road's tavern, frequented by poor whites and enlisted men, or when the nights were warm, to a moonlit sward, on which he would invite his audience to a reel which

left all breathless. While there was a rollicking element in the strains of his fiddle which a deacon could not resist, he, with the intuition of genius, adapted himself to the class before him. In the parlor, he called off the figures of a quadrille with a "by-yer-leave-sah" air, selecting as a rule, the highest class of music that had blessed his ears, for he was ear-taught only. He would hold a half-washed dish suspended minutes at a time while listening to one "ob de young missys at de pianny. Dat's de way I'se pick up my most scrumptious pieces. Dey cyant play nuffin in de daytime dat I cyant 'prove on in de ebenin';" and his vanity did not lead him much astray. But when with those of his own color, or with the humbler classes, he gave them the musical vernacular of the region,—rude, traditional quicksteps and songs, strung together with such variations of his own as made

him the envy and despair of all other fiddlers in the vicinity. Indeed, he could rarely get away from a great house without a sample of his powers in this direction, and then blending with the rhythmical cadence of feet, the rustle of garments, would be evoked ripples of mirth and bursts of laughter that were echoed back from the dim pine-groves without. Finally, when with his great foot beating time on the floor and every muscle of his body in motion, he ended with an original arrangement of "Dixie," the eyes of the gentlest maiden would flash as she joined the chorus of the men in gray, who were scarcely less excited for the moment than they would have been in a headlong cavalry charge.

These were moments of glory for Jeff. In fact, on all similar occasions he had a consciousness of his power; he made the slave forget his bondage, the poor whites their poverty, maid-

ens the absence of their fathers, brothers, and lovers, and the soldier the chances against his return.

At last there came a summer day when other music than that of Jeff's fiddle resounded through that region. Two armies met and grappled through the long sultry hours. Every moment death-wounds were given and received, for thick as insects in woods, grove, and thicket, bullets whizzed on their fatal mission; while from every eminence the demoniacal shells shrieked in exultation over the havoc they wrought.

Jeff's home was on the edge of the battle-field, and as he trembled in the darkest corner of the cellar, he thought, "Dis yer beats all de thunder-gusts I eber heered crack, run togedder in one big hurricane."

With the night came silence, except as it was broken by the groans and cries of wounded men; and later the contending forces departed, hav-

ing accorded to the fallen such poor burial as was given them when life was cheap and death the chief harvester in Virginia.

For a day or two Jeff's conscience was active, and the memory of the resolutions inspired by the din of war gave to his thin visage a preternatural seriousness. Dishes were washed in such brief time and so thoroughly, and such havoc made in the garden-weeds that the world might make a note of Jeff's idea of reform (to its advantage). In the evening his fiddle wailed out psalm-tunes to the entire exclusion of its former carnal strains.

It must be admitted, however, that Jeff's grace was like the early dew. On the third evening, "Ole Dan Tucker" slipped in among the hymns, and these were played in a time scarcely befitting their character. Then came a bit of news that awakened a wholly different train of thought and desire. A colored boy,

more venturous than himself, was said to have picked up some "Linkum" money on the battle-field. This information shed on the wild wooded tract where the war trumpet had raged the most fiercely a light more golden than that of the moon then at its full; and Jeff resolved that with the coming night he also would explore a region which, nevertheless, had nameless terrors for him.

"Ef dere 's spooks anywhere dey 's dereaway," he muttered over his hoe; "but den, ki! dey woan 'fere wid dis yer niggah. What hab I'se got ter do wid de wah and de fighten an de jabbin'? De spooks cyant lay nuffin ter me eben ef ole marse an' de res' am a-fighten ter keep dere slabes, as folks say."

Having thus satisfied himself that the manes of the dead thousands could have no controversy with him, Jeff mustered sufficient resolution to visit the field that night. He took no one

into his confidence, fearing if he discovered treasures of any kind he could not be left in undisturbed possession. During the day the rudiments of imagination which made him a musician had been conjuring up the possible results of his expedition.

"De ting fer dis cullud pusson ter do is ter p'amble late ter de Linkum lines,—Ki! I doan wan' what drap outen *our* sogers' pockets. I kin git Virginny-leaf widouten runnin' 'mong de spooks arter it. De place fer a big fine is whar de brush is tick and de Linkum men crawl away so dey woan be tromp on. Who knows but I kin fine a place whar a ginral hide hisself! Ob cose if he hab a lot of gold he'd stick it in de bush or kiver it right smart, so dat oders moun n't get it foh he could helf hisself."

Jeff thought he had reasoned himself into such a valorous state that

he could walk across the deserted battle-field with nonchalance; but as he entered on a deeply-shadowed dirt-road long since disused to any extent, he found strange creeping sensations running up and down his back. The moonlight flitted through the leaves with fantastic effects. A young silver poplar looked ghastly in the distance; and now and then a tree cut off by a shot looked almost human in its mutilation.

He had not gone very far before he saw what appeared to be the body of a man lying across the road. With a sudden chill of blood he stopped and stared at the object. Gradually it resolved itself into a low mound in the dim light. Approaching cautiously, he discovered with a dull sense of horror that a soldier had been buried where he had fallen, but covered so slightly that the tumulous scarcely more than outlined his form.

"Ob cose I knowed I'd hab ter see dese tings foh I started. What I such a fool fer? De Feds nor de Yanks ain' a-gwine ter bodder me if I ain' stepin' on 'em or ober 'em." And he went scrupulously on the other side of the road.

By and by, however, he came to a part of the wood-lane where men had fallen by the score, and bodies had been covered in twos, threes, and dozens. His head felt as if his very wool were straightening itself out, as he wound here and there and zig-zagged in all directions lest he should step on or over a grave. A breeze stirred the forest as if all the thousands buried in its shades had heaved a long deep sigh. With chattering teeth Jeff stopped to listen, then, reassured, continued to pick his tortuous way. Suddenly there was an ominous rustling in a thicket just behind. He broke into a headlong flight across and over everything,

when the startled grunt of a hog revealed the prosaic nature of this spook. Scarcely any other sound could have been more reassuring. The animal suggested bacon and hominy and hoe-cake, everything except the ghostly. He berated himself angrily:—

"Ki! you niggah! dat ar hog got mo' co'age dan you. He know he hab nuffin mo' to do wid de spooks dan you hab. De run ain' far, and when I gits ober dat de spooks on de side dis way cyant cross arter me;" and he hastened toward the spot where he supposed the Federals had been massed the most heavily, crossing an open field and splashing through a shallow place in the river, that their ghostships might be reminded of running water.

On the farther slope were the same sad evidences of poor mortality, graves here and there and often all too shallow, broken muskets, bullet-per-

forated canteens and torn knapsacks; —the debris of a pitched battle. Many trees and shrubs were so lacerated that their foliage hung limp and wilting, while bows with shrivelled leaves strewed the ground. Nature's wounds indicated that men had fought here and been mutilated as ruthlessly.

For a time nothing of value rewarded Jeff's search, and he began to succumb to the gruesome associations of the place. At last he resolved to examine one more thicket that bordered an old rail-fence, and then make a long detour rather than go back by the graveyard road over which he had come. Pushing the bushes aside, he peered among their shadows for some moments, and then uttered an exclamation of surprise and terror as he bounded backward. There was no mistake this time; he had seen the figure of a man with a ray of moonlight filtering through

the leaves on a ghastly bullet-hole in his temple He sat with his back against the fence, and had not moved after receiving the shock. At his feet, dropped evidently from his nerveless hand, lay a metal box. All had flashed almost instantaneously on Jeff's vision.

For some moments he was in doubt whether to take to his heels homeward or reconnoiter again. The soldier sat in such a lifelike attitude that while Jeff knew the man must be dead, taking the box seemed like robbing the living. Yes, worse than that, for to the superstitious negro the dead soldier appeared to be watching his treasure.

Jeff's cupidity slowly mastered his fears. Cautiously approaching the figure, he again pushed aside the screening boughs, and with chattering teeth and trembling limbs, looked upon the silent guardian of the treasure, half expecting the dead man to

raise his head, and warn him off with a threatening gesture. Since the figure remained motionless, Jeff made a headlong plunge, clutched the box, then ran half a mile without thinking to look back.

Not for his life would he cross the battle-field again; so it was late when by wide circuit he approached the dwelling of his mistress. His panic had gradually subsided, and as he noted familiar objects, he felt that he was beyond the proper range of the unjust spirits of the dead.

The soldier he had left sitting against the fence troubled him, it is true; and he was not quite sure that he was through with one so palpably robbed. That he had not been followed appeared certain; that the question of future ownership of the treasure could be settled was a matter of superstitious belief. There was only one way, — he must hide the box in a secret nook, and if it re-

mained undisturbed for a reasonable length of time, he might hope for its undisturbed enjoyment. Accordingly he stole into a dense copse and buried his booty at the foot of a persimmon tree, then gained his humble quarter and slept so late and soundly that he had to be dragged almost without the door the next morning before he shook off his lethargy.

CHAPTER II.

ITS INFLUENCE.

WITH the exception of aptitude which enabled Jeff to catch and fix a tune in his mind with a fair degree of correctness, his mental processes were slow. Moreover, whether he should ever have any trouble with "spooks" or not, one thing was true of him, as of many others in all stations of life, he was haunted by the

ghost of a conscience. This uneasy spirit suggested to him with annoying iteration that his proceedings the night before had been of very unusual and doubtful character. When at last fully awake, he sought to appease the accusing voice by unwonted diligence in all his tasks, until the fat cook, a devout Baptist, took more than one occasion to say, "You 'se in a promisin' frame Jeff. Ef I 'se ony shoah dat yer hole out long anough to git 'mersed, I 'd hab hopes on yer, but, law! yer'll be a-fiddlin' de debil's tunes 'fo' de week is out. I'se afeared dat dere must be an awful prov'dence, like a battle or harricane, onst a week, ter keep yer ser'ous;" and the old woman sniffed down at him with ill-concealed disdain from her superior spiritual height.

Jeff was as serious as could have been wished all that day, for there was much on his mind. Perplexing

questions tinged with supernatural terrors tormented him. Passing over those having a moral point, the most urgent one was, "S'pose dat ar soger miss him box an' come arter it ternight. Ki! If I go ter see, I mout run right on ter de spook. I'se a-gwine ter gib 'im his chance, an' den take mine." So that evening Jeff fortified himself and increased the cook's hope by a succession of psalm-tunes in which there was no lapse toward the "debil's" music.

Next morning, after a long sleep, Jeff's nerves were stronger, and he began to take a high hand with conscience.

"Dat ar soger has hab his chance," he reasoned. "Ef he want de box he mus' 'a' com arter it las' night. I'se done bin fa'r wid him, an' now ternight, ef dat ar box ain' 'sturbed, I'se a-gwine ter see de'scription an' heft on it. Toder night I was so

'fuscated dat I couldn't know nuffin straight."

When all were sleeping, he stole to the persimmon-tree and was elated to find his treasure where he had slightly buried it. The little box seemed heavy, and was wholly unlike anything he had ever seen before.

"Ob cose it's got money in it," Jeff reasoned. "Nuffin else 'ud be done up so tight and strong. I'se woan open it jes' yet, feared de missus or de colored boys 'spec' someting. Ki! I is n't a-gwine ter be tied up, an' hab dat box whip out in me. I'll tink how I kin hide an' spen' de money kine of slowcution like." With this he restored the prize to its shallow excavation and covered it with leaves that no trace of fresh earth might be visible.

Jeff's deportment now began to evince a new evolution in mental and moral process. The influence of

riches was quite as marked upon him as upon so many of his white brothers and sisters, proving their essential kinship. To-day he began to sniff disdainfully at his menial tasks; and in the evening "Ole Dan Tucker" resounded from his fiddle with a rollicking abandon over which the cook groaned in despair, "Dat ar niggah's 'ligion drop off ob 'im like a yaller pig from de bush. 'Ligion dat's skeert inter us hain't no 'count anyhow."

During the next few days it was evident that Jeff was falling from grace rapidly. Never had he been so slow and careless in his tasks. More than once the thought crossed his mind that he had better take his box and "cut stick" for Washington, where he believed that wealth and his fiddle would give him prominence over his race. For prudential and other reasons he was in no haste to open the box, preferring rather to

gloat over it and to think how he could spend the money to the greatest advantage. He had been paying his court to a girl as black as himself on a neighboring plantation; but he now regarded that affair as preposterous.

"She ain' good nuff fer me no mo'," he reasoned. "I'se a-gwine ter shine up ter dat yaller Suky dat's been a-holdin' her head so high ober ter Marse Perkins's. I'se invited ter play ober dar ter-night. an' I'll make dat gal open her eye. Ki! she tinks no culled gemmen in dese parts fit ter hole a cannle when she braid her long straight ha'r, but when she see de ribbin I kin git her ter tie dat ha'r up wid, an' de earrings I kin put in her ears, she larf on toder side ob her face. 'Fo' I go I 'se a-gwine ter buy dat ar gole ring ob Sam Milkins down at de tavern. S'pose it does take all I 'se been sabin' up, I 'se needn't sabe any mo'. Dat ar box got nuff in it ter

keep me like a lawd de rest ob my life. I'd open it ter-night if I wasn't goin' ter Marse Perkins's."

Jeff carried out his high-handed measures and appeared that evening at "Marse Perkins's" with a ring of portentous size squeezed on the little finger of his left hand. It had something of the color of gold, and that is the best that can be said of it; but it had left its purchaser penniless. This fact sat lightly on Jeff's mind, however, as he remembered the box at the foot of the persimmon-tree; and he stalked into the detached kitchen, where a dusky assemblage were to indulge in a shuffle, with the air of one who intends that his superiority shall be recognized at once.

"Law sakes, Jeff!" said Mandy, his hitherto ebon flame, "yer comes in like a turkey gobbler. Doesn't yer know me?"

"Sartin I know yer, Mandy. You'se a good gal in you 'se way, but, law!

you 'se had yer spell. A culled gemmen kin change his min' when he sees dat de 'finity 's done gone."

"Look here, Jeff Wobbles, does yer mean ter give me de sack?"

"I mean ter gib yer good-ebenin', Miss Mandy Munson. Yer cyant 'spec' a gemmen to be degaged in de music an' a gal at de same time," replied Jeff, with oppressive gravity.

"Mister Johnsing, I'se tank yer fo' yer arm," said Mandy to a man near, with responsive dignity. "Yer wait on me here, an' yer kin wait on me home. I'se 'shamed on mysef dat I took up wid a lout dat kin do nuffin but fiddle; but I was kine ob sorry fer him, he sich a fool."

"Go 'long," remarked Jeff, smiling mysteriously. "Ef yer knowed, yer 'ud be wringin' yer han's wuss dan yer did at de las' 'tracted meetin'. Ah, Miss Suky, dat you?" and Jeff for the first time doffed his hat.

"W'at 's in de win', Jeff, dat yer so

scrumptious an' bumptious like dis ebenin'?" Suky asked a trifle scornfully.

"W'en de 'freshments parse 'roun' I'se 'steem it a oblegation ter me ef yer'll let me bring yer de cake an' cider. I'se sumpin fer yer. Gemmen an' ladies, took yer places," he added in a stentorian voice; "I ax yer 'sideration fer bein' late, cose I had 'portant business; now,

"Bow dar, scrape dar;
Doan hang about de doah,
Shine up ter de pretty gals,
An' lead 'em on de floah,"—

his fiddle seconding his exhortation with such inciting strains that soon there was not a foot but was keeping time.

Suky observed that the musician had eyes for her only, and that toward all others he maintained his depressing superiority. In vain did Mandy lavish tokens of favor on "Mister Johnsing." Jeff did not lose

his sudden and unexpected indifference; while the great ring glistening on his finger added to the mystery. There were many whispered surmises; but gradually the conjecture that he had "foun' a heap ob Linkum money" was regarded as the best explanation of the marked change in his bearing.

Curiosity soon became more potent than Jeff's fiddle, and the "'freshments" were hurried up. So far from resenting this, Jeff put his violin under his arm and stalked across the improvised ball-room to Miss Suky, oblivious of the fact that she had a suitor on either side.

"Gemmen," he remarked with condescension, "dis lady am degaged ter me durin' de 'freshments period,'" and he held out his arm in such a way that the massive ring glittered almost under Suky's nose. The magnet drew. His arm was taken in spite

of the protests of the enamoured swains.

"Permit me de suggestation," continued Jeff, "dat ter a lady ob yer 'finement, dis place am not fit ter breve in. Wha's mo', I doan 'cline ter hab dese yer common niggahs a-whispirin' an' a-pintin' an' a-jecturin' about us. Lemme get yer a seat under de lite ob de risin' moon. De dusk 'll obscurate yer loveleness so I'se dar' tell all de news."

Suky, mystified and expectant, but complacent over another conquest, made no objections to these whispered "suggestations," and was led to a seat under the shadow of a tree. A chorus of not very flattering remarks broke out, ceasing as suddenly when Jeff returned for a portion of the cake and cider.

"Mister Wobbles, yer's prettin' on high de airs ter-night." Suky remarked, with an interrogation point in her voice.

"Here's ter de health ob Mrs. Wobbles," he answered, lifting the cider to his lips.

"I'se no 'jections ter dat. Who is she ter be?" replied Suky, very innocently.

"It's not my 'tention ter go furder and far' wuss. Dis am a case wha de presen' company am not 'cepted."

"No, not axcepted jes' yet, Mr. Wobbles, if yer'se 'dressin' yer remarks ter me. Yer is goin' on jes' a little too far."

"P'raps a little far; but yer'll soon catch up wid me. Yer'se a lady dat got a min' ob her own, I hope?"

"It's mine yet, anyhow."

"An' yer kin keep as mum as a possum w'en de cawn is in de milk?"

"Dat 'pends."

"Ob cose it does. But I'll trus' yer; yer ain' de one ter bite yer own nose off. Does yer see dat ar ring, Suky? Law! how pretty dat look on yer degaged finger!"

"'T ain dar yet."

"Lemme put it dar. Ki! wouldn't dey look an' gape an' pint in dar yonder w'en yer come a-sailin' in wid dat ring on?"

"Yes; dey tink me a big fool ter be captivated by a ring,—brass, too, like anuff."

"No, Suky, it's gole,—yallow gole, di 'plexion ob yer own fair han'. But, law! dis ain' nuffin ter what I'se 'll git yer. Yer'se shall hab rings an' dresses an' jules till yer 'stinguish de oder gals like de sun put out de stars."

"What yer foun', Jeff Wobbles?"

"I'se foun' what'll make yer a lady if yer hab sense. I'se gib yer de compliment ob s'lecting yer ter shar' my fine if yer'll lemme put dis ring on yer degaged finger."

"Yer doan say nuffin 'bout lub in dis yer 'rangement," Suky simpered, sidling up to him.

"Oh, dat kind ob sent'ment 'll do fer common niggahs," Jeff explained

with dignity. "I'se hurd my missus talk 'bout 'liances 'twixt people of quality. Ki! Suky, I'se in a 'sition now ter make a 'liance wid yer. Yer ain' like dat low gal, Mandy. What Mister Johnsing ever hab ter gib her but a lickin' some day? I'se done wid dat common class; I may fiddle fur 'em now an' den, jes' ter see dem sport deysefs, while I'se lookin' on kin' ob s'periur like, yer know. But den, dey ain' our kin' ob folks. Yer'se got qulities dat'll shine like de risin' moon dar." Then in a whisper he added, "De Linkum sogars is off dar ter the east'erd. One night's trabel an' dey'd sen' us on ter Washin'on. Onst yer git dar, an' hab all de jules an' dresses dat I gib yer, dar's not a culled gemmen dere away but 'ud bow down ter yer."

Here was a dazzling vista that Suky could not resist. Her ideas of freedom, like those of Jeff, were not very exalted. At that period, slave

property in the vicinity of the Union lines was fast melting away; and scarcely a night elapsed but some one was missing, the more adventurous and intelligent escaping first, and others following as opportunity and motive pointed the way. The region under consideration had not yet been occupied by the Federals, and there was still no slight risk involved in flight. Suky did not realize the magnitude of the project. She was not the first of her sex to be persuaded by a cavalier and promised gold to take a leap into the dark.

As a result of Jeff's representations the "'liance" was made there and then, secrecy promised, and an escape to Washington agreed upon as soon as circumstances permitted,—Suky's mind, I regret to say, dwelling more on "gemmen bowing down" to her than on the devotion of the allied suitor.

No lady of rank in Timbuctoo

could have sailed into the kitchen ball-room with greater state than Suky now after the compact had been made, Jeff supporting her on his arm with the conscious air of one who has taken the prize from all competitors. With the assurance of a potentate he ensconced himself in the orchestra corner and called the dancers to their feet.

But the spirit of mutiny was present. Eager eyes noted that the ring on his bow-hand was gone. Then it was seen glistening on Suky's hand as she ostentatiously fanned herself. The clamor broke out, "Mister Johnsing," incited by Mandy and the two swains between whom Suky had been sandwiched, leading the revolt against Jeff's arrogance and success.

There were many, however, who had no personal wrongs to right, and who did not relish being made a cat's paw by the disaffected. These were

bent on the natural progression and conclusion of the dance. In consequence of the wordy uproar the master of the premises appeared and cleared them all out, sending his own servants to their quarters.

Jeff nearly came to grief that night, for a party of the malcontents followed him on his homeward walk. Suspecting their purpose, he dodged behind some shrubbery, heard their threats to break his head and smash his fiddle, and then went back to a tryst with Suky.

That sagacious damsel had been meditating on the proposed alliance. Even in her rather sophisticated mind she had regarded a semblance of love as essential; but since Jeff had put everything on such superior grounds, she felt that she should prove herself fit for new and exalted conditions of life by seeing to it that he made good all his remarkable promises. She remembered that he

had not yet opened the box of money, and became a little sceptical as to its contents. Somebody might have watched Jeff, and have carried it off.

True, she had the ring, but that was not the price of her hand. Nothing less than had been promised would answer now; and when she stole out to meet Jeff she told him so. Under the witching moonlight he began to manifest tendencies to sentiment and tenderness. Her response was prompt: "Go 'long! what dese common niggah ways got ter do wid a 'liance? Yer show me de gole in dat box,—dat's de bargain. Den de 'liance hole me fas', an' I'll help yer spen' de money in Washin'on. We'll hab a weddin' scrumptious as white folks. But, law sakes! Jeff Wobbles, 't ain' no kin' ob 'liance till I see dat gole an' hab some ob it too!"

Jeff had to succumb like many a high-born suitor before him, with the added chagrin of remembering that

he had first suggested the purely business-like aspect of his motive.

"Berry well; meet me here ter-morrer night when I whistle like a whip-o'-will. But yer ain' so smart as yer tink yer are, Suky. Yer'se made it cl'ar ter me dat I'se got ter keep de han'lin' ob dat gole or you'll be a-carryin' dis 'liance business too far! If I gib yer gole, I expec' yer shine up an be 'greeable-like ter me ebbery way yer know how. Dat's only fa'r, doggoned ef it ain'!" and Jeff spoke in a very aggrieved tone.

Wily Suky chucked him under the chin, saying, "Show me de color ob de gole an' de 'liance come out all right." Then she retired, believing that negotiations had proceeded far enough for the present.

Jeff went home feeling that he had been forewarned and forearmed. Since her heart responded to a golden key only, he would keep that key and use it judiciously.

During the early hours of the following night Jeff was very weary and soon discovered that he was watched. He coolly slipped the collar from a savage dog, and soon there was a stampede from a neighboring grove. An hour after, when all had become quiet again, he took the dog and armed with an axe, started out, fully resolved on breaking the treasure-box which he had been hoarding.

The late moon had risen, giving to Jeff a gnome-like aspect as he dug at the root of the persimmon-tree. The mysterious box soon gleamed with a pale light in his hand, like the leaden casket that contained Portia's radiant face. Surely, when he struck the "open, sesame" blow, that beauty which captivates young and old alike would dazzle his eyes. With heart now devoid of all compunction, and exultant in anticipation, he struck the box, shaving off the end he held

farthest from him. An "ancient fish-like smell" filled the air; Jeff sank on the ground and stared at sardines and rancid oil dropping instead of golden dollars from his treasure-box. They scarcely touched the ground before the dog snapped them all up.

The bewildered negro knew not what to think. Had fish been the original contents of the box; or had the soldier's spook transformed the gold into this horrid mess? One thing, however, was clear,—he had lost, not only Suky, but prestige. The yellow girl would scorn him, and tell of his preposterous promises. Mandy had been offended beyond hope, and he would become the laughing-stock and byword of all the colored boys for miles around.

"Dar's nuffin lef' fer me but ter put out fer freedom," he soliloquized; "ki! I'se a-gwine ter git eben wid dat yallar gal yet. I'll cut stick ter-morrer night and she'll tink I 'sconded

alone, totin' de box wid me, and dat she was too sharp in dat 'liance business."

So it turned out; Jeff and his fiddle vanished, leaving nothing to sustain Suky under the gibes of her associates except the ring, which she eventually learned was as brazen as her own ambition.

Jeff wandered into the service of a Union officer whose patience he tried even more than that of his tolerant Southern mistress; but when by the camp-fire he brought out his violin, all his shortcomings were condoned.

END.